

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

## Prison-Based Transformative Learning and Its Role in Life After Release

### Thesis

#### How to cite:

Pike, Anne (2015). Prison-Based Transformative Learning and Its Role in Life After Release. PhD thesis The Open University.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2015 The Author



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.0000f00c>

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

[oro.open.ac.uk](http://oro.open.ac.uk)

# Prison-based transformative learning and its role in life after release

---

**by Anne Pike**

MRes (Education), MSc, BSc (Hons), PGCE (PCET)

**A thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Education**

**Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology,  
Open University**

**Date of submission: 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014**

Date of Submission: 30 September 2014

Date of Award: 12 February 2015  
Date of Award: 12 February 2015

ProQuest Number: 13834868

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 13834868

Published by ProQuest LLC (2019). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code  
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

## **Abstract**

Higher-level education in prison is offered mostly through distance learning. Previous research found many barriers to studying this Prison-based Higher-level Distance learning (PHDL) but also suggested that prisoners who persevered with their study appeared changed in some way and perceived themselves to have more chance of a better future. There is, however, very little understanding of how such change occurs or whether it actually makes a difference to them after prison. This thesis presents research which investigated in what ways PHDL is transformative and what role it plays in learners' lives after release. Qualitative, ethnographic and longitudinal in approach, the research was split into three phases. The pilot phase involved interviewing 10 ex-prisoners who had completed PHDL. The in-prison phase involved ethnographic fieldwork in 10 prisons in England and Wales with 51 serving prisoners who were due for release and had either completed PHDL or had considered but not engaged with PHDL, this second group providing comparative analysis. The post-release phase traced 28 of those prisoners after release, and engaged with many for up to one year, as they attempted to integrate back into society. An additional perspective was gained from 63 others such as staff, educators and family. A thematic analysis of the complex data identified physical, infrastructural and organisational factors affecting the participants which were mostly barriers to learning and integration. These were mediated by social support factors of family, individual staff, and the perception of being part of a learning community. The psychological outcomes from the interaction of these factors included a positive student identity, resilience and hope which were carried with participants upon release. The immediate post-release environment was chaotic and most participants failed to continue studying, temporarily losing their positive student identity. There was very little social support at this time and it was the participants' own resilience and hope which helped them to survive until life began to



improve. Ultimately it was found that those who were able to capitalise on their learning were better placed to integrate into society.

## **Preface**

My interest in the role of education for prisoners stemmed from my experiences of teaching in prison and was developed further through my previous research which included the initial period of training for the PhD. This thesis specifically builds on the work that I completed in the MRes, published as Pike and Adams (2012), which generated the concept of a 'learning' prison and a 'working' prison, as two ends of a spectrum of different prison contexts. That concept has been developed throughout this thesis and embellished with its underlying factors, its role in transformative learning and, longitudinally, its role in post-release outcomes.

I would like to begin my acknowledgements with my sincere thanks to my supervisors Anne Adams and John Richardson for their amazingly comprehensive support and guidance which has been invaluable. I would also like to thank Anne Forward who was always there to answer my, sometimes inane, administrative questions and all the others who made up the excellent support network in CREET.

I would like to thank my post-grad colleagues for their friendship, conversation and encouragement. Particular thanks go to Carol Jarvis who has provided me with many hours of discussion, which have enabled me to clarify my ideas. Thanks also go to all those who helped me with the data collection, particularly my participants in and out of prison, who were so willing to share their views and without whom there would have been no research.

Finally, my sincere thanks go to my wonderful family, Steve, Ben and Georgina have not only had to put up with my moods and distraction over the last four years but also offered their encouragement, advice and support. Thanks again to Steve, and also Doreen, for their painstaking, proof-reading of my drafts.



## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	iii
Preface .....	v
Table of Contents .....	vii
List of Figures .....	x
List of Tables .....	x
List of Boxes .....	x
Chapter 1: Introduction to thesis .....	1
1.1 Rationale for the research .....	1
1.2 The aim and structure of this thesis .....	3
1.3 Setting the scene: The prison context .....	7
1.4 The post-release environment: Resettlement and desistance .....	17
1.5 Chapter conclusion .....	19
Chapter 2: The Power of Learning .....	21
2.1 Introduction .....	21
2.2 Transformative adult learning .....	21
2.3 Transformative learning as an epistemological developmental process .....	26
2.4 Transformative learning and Identity .....	34
2.5 Transformative learning and context: social and situated learning .....	37
2.6 Transformative learning and the prison context .....	44
2.7: Transformative learning and the post-release environment .....	55
2.8 Chapter conclusion .....	62
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	65
3.1 Introduction .....	65

3.2 Research approach .....	66
3.3 Rationale for a phased research approach .....	72
3.4 The Sample: Site and participant selection .....	74
3.5 Methods of data collection .....	81
3.6 Analysis and representation of data .....	93
3.7 Risks, challenges and ethical considerations .....	94
3.8 Chapter conclusions .....	99
Chapter 4: Data collection and analysis .....	101
4.1 Introduction .....	101
4.2 Access: Permission and selection .....	102
4.3 Data collection .....	113
4.4 Analysis of the data .....	123
4.5 Validity and ethical considerations .....	130
4.6 Chapter conclusions .....	132
Chapter 5: Pre-release findings: In what ways is prison-based higher-level distance learning transformative? .....	135
5.1 Introduction .....	135
5.2 Why higher-level distance learning? The journey starts here .....	137
5.3 Structural factors affecting learning in prison .....	145
5.4 Social support factors: A network of support for PHDL .....	171
5.5 Psychological outcomes: change through PHDL .....	183
5.6 Chapter conclusions .....	198
Chapter 6: Post-release findings: Life after prison .....	205
6.1 Introduction .....	205

6.2 Immediate post-release findings: Many more hills to climb .....	206
6.3 Beginning to adjust: Improvements over time .....	245
6.4 Participants' views on improvements needed .....	254
6.5 Chapter conclusions .....	257
Chapter 7: Discussion: Learning journeys .....	263
7.1 Introduction .....	263
7.2 In-prison: in what ways is PHDL transformative? .....	265
7.3 Post-release: the role of PHDL in life after release .....	279
7.4 PHDL as transformation: Integration into society .....	287
7.5 Chapter conclusions .....	294
Chapter 8: Conclusions .....	299
8.1 Overview of the research .....	299
8.2 Limitations of the research with suggestions for further research .....	309
8.3 Personal reflection: what I have learned from the research process .....	314
8.4 Final thoughts .....	315
REFERENCES .....	317
APPENDICES .....	339
APPENDIX A: Glossary of terms .....	341
APPENDIX B: Selection of information sheets and consent form .....	345
APPENDIX C: Interview prompts .....	349
APPENDIX D: Ethical approval letter from Open University's Human Research Ethics Committee .....	351
APPENDIX E: NOMS Permission process: selected examples .....	353
APPENDIX F Participant Characteristics .....	364

APPENDIX G: Longitudinal data collection.....	373
APPENDIX H: Examples of thematic analysis .....	375

## List of Figures

Figure 1.1	March 2011 Prison population	10
Figure 2.1	Social theory of learning	40
Figure 7.1	PHDL student learning journey in a 'working prison	267
Figure 7.2	PHDL student learning journey in a 'learning prison	268
Figure 7.3	Post-release journey to integration	280
Figure 7.4	Model of PHDL for successful integration	291

## List of Tables

Table 3.1	Selection criteria for site and participant samples	78
Table 3.2	Summary of plan for data collection methods	92
Table 4.1	Final numbers of prisons and participants	103
Table 4.2	Data collection across prisons	111
Table 4.3	Summary of data collection process	114
Table 4.4	Examples of coding	125
Table 7.1	Comparison of participants' perceptions before and after release	287

## List of Boxes

Box 8.1	Good practice example of a 'learning' prison	299
---------	--	-----



# **Chapter 1: Introduction to thesis**

## **1.1 Rationale for the research**

As an adult education teacher, I had taught mathematics, technology and science to adults from many different walks of life and in many different learning contexts. Therefore, when I was asked to teach in a local prison, I thought it would be just another set of students in just another learning context. However, I soon realised that teaching and learning in a prison was very different from any other context I had known. The education department in which I taught looked normal enough, with its classrooms and corridors although the barred windows were small and high up so there was very little natural light and there was an emergency button on the wall of the classroom. There were, however, two other key differences.

Firstly, the strict prison regime was pervasive and education was low priority. Prisoners could be removed from class, or indeed the prison, without any notice and regardless of their learning or assessment needs. Secondly, the prisoners were always very grateful, much more than one would expect from students, generally. They were grateful to be in the education department which was a calm, safe, space in an otherwise harsh environment. They were grateful to have the chance to learn, to be treated as a learner rather than a prisoner and to be treated as a person rather than a number. Although many had not received a formal education and were nervous of the classroom environment, they were keen to learn and developed quickly, wanting to progress to higher-level study.

When I began to tutor prisoners, in my role as a tutor for the Open University, my interest in the student-prisoner's learning journey deepened. Most of the higher-level (tertiary) education in prisons is offered through distance learning, which is outside the

normal education provision. It requires support from the education department and relies heavily on charitable funding or self-funding. There are thought to be approximately 4000 prisoners each year studying through distance learning (Schüller, 2009), although the actual numbers are unknown as distance learners are not targeted or recorded within the prison system. I was particularly interested to know how the student-prisoners managed to cope with their studies and what benefits they perceived.

My first research investigated student-prisoners' distance-learning experiences across eight different prisons. The findings highlighted significant and increasing barriers to study, in particular a lack of access to technology which was not directly related to security concerns (Adams and Pike, 2008a, b). However, despite the barriers, the student-prisoners were very positive about their learning and perceived the benefits to be far-reaching. In particular, at some point in the learning journey, sometimes after two or three courses, these student-prisoners appeared to be changed in some way, developing aspirations for a different life to the one they had been leading (Pike, 2009, 2010a). Then during a Masters in Research with the Open University, I investigated how student-prisoners accessed and used technology to support their learning and what were their attitudes towards technology-supported distance-learning in prison. Findings provided a greater understanding of the physical and institutional barriers to higher-level distance-learning. It identified that student-prisoners were often isolated and fought to maintain an essential student identity which seemed to be transformative ((Pike, 2010b; Pike and Adams, 2012).

Other researchers (Costelloe, 2003; Forster, 1976, 1996; Hughes, 2007, 2012; Jupp, 2010) have also observed potentially transformational change in higher-level learners within a prison environment and they have suggested that the skills developed through their learning could potentially improve employment prospects, reduce reoffending and

improve other life chances on release. However, none of these researchers had followed their participants after release from prison and there was a lack of understanding about how any changes through prison-based learning might actually have an effect on post-release life. There was a serious need for a longitudinal study which focused on learning. This research has therefore, been designed to investigate the learning journeys of prisoners who have been studying higher-level courses through distance learning in prison and are then released into society. What is their story? Does their learning make a difference to their lives after release?

## **1.2 The aim and structure of this thesis**

### **1.2.1 The aim of the thesis**

The broad aim of this thesis is to explore the ways in which Prison-based Higher-level Distance Learning (PHDL) is transformative (Mezirow, 1997) and to investigate whether and how it actually makes a difference to learners' lives after they are released from prison. This aim is more clearly defined through the two research questions which emerge from the literature, as follows:-

#### **1. In what ways is PHDL transformative?**

- In what ways can it lead to personal change in the learner?
- How does that change relate to hopes and aspirations for future prospects and life chances?

#### **2. What role does PHDL play in the learners' life after prison?**

- How does it equip learners with personal and social qualities required to manage life after prison?
- How does it relate to their integration into society?

In order to answer these questions, the research took a qualitative, ethnographic and longitudinal approach (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Holland et al., 2007). The in-depth data was generated from multiple qualitative data collection methods, with an emphasis on in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Adams and Cox, 2008). The research was separated into three data collection phases, enabling the methodology and permissions processes to be specifically tailored, as follows:-

**The pilot phase** aimed to provide a historical perspective of the role of PHDL in life after prison as well as information about the learning environment in prison, the resettlement process and issues facing released prisoners. It used a qualitative, retrospective, approach and one-off (face-to-face and telephone) interviews with 10 ex-prisoners who had experiences of PHDL.

**The in-prison phase** aimed to identify the transformative factors in PHDL and its effect on student-prisoners' hopes and aspirations for future life chances. It used an ethnographic approach to investigate perceptions of transformative learning of adult prisoners who were studying (or had hoped to study) PHDL within the complex prison environment. Participant observation and individual, face-to-face, interviews were conducted with 51 serving prisoners (men and women), who were due for release, in 10 prisons in England and Wales.

**The post-release phase** aimed to establish how the learners' hopes and aspirations for life chances played out upon release and how their learning related to their actual life chances. It used a qualitative, prospective longitudinal approach which consisted of tracing the second phase participants after release and re-interviewing as many as possible (approximately 50% were re-interviewed up to five times) during their first year after prison.

Throughout the research, additional data sources included field-notes of observations and informal conversations with relevant others such as prison and probation staff, educators, peers and family. The transcribed interview data, field notes and much of the additional data was brought together into NVivo10 (see glossary in Appendix A) and was thematically analysed (Braun and Clarke, 2006) on an ongoing basis, to identify themes which ran through the learning journeys. Initial findings from the pilot phase provided guidance for selection and focus for the main research phases which followed. The emergent themes provided the important determinants for transformative learning in prison and integration into society upon release.

### **1.2.2 Outline of the thesis**

**Chapter 1**, this introductory chapter, provides the rationale, aims and outline of the thesis and provides a background to the penal system in England and Wales, the resettlement (release) process and the role of probation, which sets the scene for the rest of the thesis.

**Chapter 2**, the literature review, critically reviews the empirical and theoretical literature which suggests the power of learning for adults. Transformative learning is used as a lens through which to review adult learning and developmental theories which have developed over recent years and the research on which they are based. Higher-level learning literature is explored in a variety of different contexts and focuses on the specific context of prison with reviews of the limited empirical literature on higher-level learning in prison. The second part of this chapter reviews the longitudinal research literature which investigates life after prison and highlights the lack of research which focuses on the role of learning.

**Chapter 3**, the methodology, outlines the design of this research, describes the theoretical approach which was adopted and the rationale for the chosen methods of

data collection. The proposed selection of the participants and research sites are outlined along with the ethical issues.

**Chapter 4**, the methods, discusses how the research plan was adjusted during the research process and how the data was actually collected and analysed.

**Chapter 5 and 6** present the research findings. Chapter 5 presents the prison-related findings from the pilot phase and the findings from analysis of the data collected during the in-prison phase of the research. It therefore aims to answer the first research question and highlights the ways in which PHDL may lead to transformative learning. Chapter 6 presents the post-release findings from the pilot phase and the findings from analysis of the longitudinal post-release phase of the research. It therefore aims to answer the second research question and identifies the role of prison-based transformative learning in life after prison.

**Chapter 7** brings the findings together and positions them within the literature. It includes unique models which show how the structural and psychosocial aspects of the prison and post-release environment act on the students' identity, positively or negatively, to produce psychological outcomes. The positive outcomes can lead to transformative learning and the qualities which support the students to face the immense challenges upon release, helping them to integrate better into society. However, the more negative outcomes can lead towards course failure, abandonment, and disillusionment, reducing social integration and increasing the potential for return to prison.

**Chapter 8** concludes the thesis by highlighting what this research has achieved, reflecting on the limitations of the research and identifying the implications for policy, practice and future research.

### **1.3 Setting the scene: The prison context**

This section sets the scene for the thesis. It provides a background account of the penal system in England and Wales, its dual function of punishment and rehabilitation, and the interventions which have been developed to encourage prisoners to turn their lives around. It also explains the resettlement process, during which prisoners are released back into society at the end of their custodial sentence. This section therefore aims to provide sufficient background knowledge of the prison system and its rehabilitative processes, to enable the reader to follow more easily the terminology and debates throughout the rest of the thesis. The account draws upon evidence from Government policy documents and statistics, third sector publications, academic literature and personal experience in order to paint a picture which is developed throughout the thesis.

#### **1.3.1 The prison structure: security, control and management**

The physical structures of the prisons in England and Wales vary. Although there are some newly built prisons with the latest technology, many of the original Victorian prisons are also still in operation today. The security classifications of prisons also vary and this affects their physical structure. Externally, prisons are either closed or open. Closed prisons have a secure perimeter fence to prevent prisoners from escaping and to physically section off the prison from the outside world. Prisoners are locked in their cells at night and part of the day. Open prisons do not have a fence and prisoners are allowed more freedom to move around; some may have their own cell keys or they may live in dormitories. Since the 1960s when the Mountbatten report proposed a significant increase in prison security (Home Office, 1966), adult male prisons have been classified according to the security category of prisoner they contain, that is Category A (high security) to Category D (low security, open prison). Women's prisons have a similar, but less complex categorisation. Prisoners with sentences of more than 2 years tend to move through the prison system during their sentence, often entering a

low security, open, prison some time before release. However, those on short sentences may stay in the same prison throughout and some prisoners will be transferred for other reasons (such as overcrowding) which can cause disruption to planned programmes of rehabilitation.

The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) is an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice and is responsible for the prison system in England and Wales. There are 130 prisons which vary considerably in age, type and size (National Audit Office, 2013) and 14 of these have contracted management and are run by private companies. There is ongoing debate about whether these 14 private prisons are better than the state prisons or not (cf. Hulley et al., 2012; Mehigan and Rowe, 2007). NOMS produces Prison Service Instructions, in collaboration with the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), to instruct all prison governors on how they should run their prisons. For example, Prison Service Instruction 33-2010 (Ministry of Justice, 2010b) stipulates that students should have some time and study facilities allocated. However, each prison has its own unique culture and there is discretion within the system for individual prison governors to interpret policies and practices in their own way (Liebling and Price, 2001) hence there is great variety in the way prisons are run which is not always related to security category (Adams and Pike, 2008a; Liebling, 2007). A recent report by the joint prison and probation inspectorate (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2013), stated that good offender management required good communication, cooperation and a holistic approach to work with prisoners but highlighted that a culture of poor communication and mistrust between prison departments undermined the potential for NOMS to successfully manage its offenders.

### **1.3.2 The prison population**

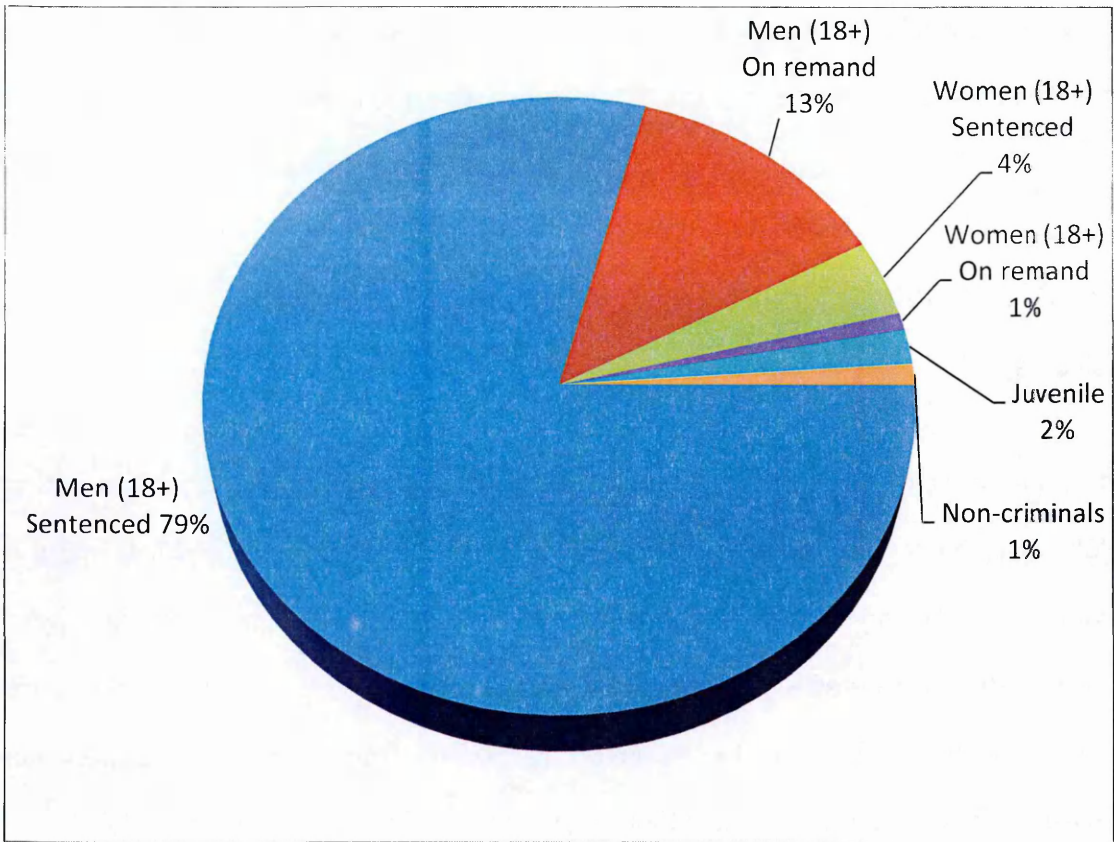
The prison population in England and Wales when the current research was designed in March 2011 was 85,400 (Ministry of Justice, 2011). Figure 1.1 shows that



approximately 92% of these were adult men over 18, of whom more than 11,000 (13%) were still awaiting trial or sentence. There were over 4000 women (5%) and the rest were either Juveniles (aged 15-17) or non-criminals (which includes such offences as contempt of court) (Ministry of Justice, 2011). Young adults, aged 18 to 20, make up approximately 10% of the prison population and are mostly housed in Young Offender Institutes.

Thirty per cent of the total adult sentenced prison population, not including young adults, were serving determinate sentences of more than four years and just under a quarter were serving sentences of between one and four years. Almost one-fifth were serving indeterminate sentences (that is life sentences or indeterminate sentences for public protection) with no known release date. Women tend to have fewer previous convictions than men; for example more than half of the women offenders in 2000 had no previous convictions compared to 42 per cent of men (Home Office, 2001).

With the exception of a few unusual women offenders such as Myra Hindley, who attract enormous media attention, women tend to commit less serious offences (cf. (Gelsthorpe and Morris, 2002; Hedderman and Gelsthorpe, 1997). As only five per cent of the prison population is women, there are fewer women's prisons and hence women are less likely to be imprisoned close to home and family.



**Figure 1.1: March 2011 Prison population**

Source: Ministry of Justice (2011)

The number of adult men in prison has risen by 30 per cent over the last decade and by 100 per cent since 1980 (Berman, 2012). The number of women in prison increased by 12 per cent over the last decade (Berman, 2012), which is a lower rate than the men but more than was hoped for, as the Corston report (Home Office, 2007) had highlighted that most women in prison posed no threat to society and recommended the reduction of custodial sentences for women. In 2012 England and Wales had the second highest number of prisoners (151) per 100,000 population in Western Europe (Berman, 2012). Almost one half of adults (47.9 per cent) released from prison are reconvicted within one year of release (Ministry of Justice, 2012). Overcrowded prisons and these high reoffending rates have fuelled the debate about the role of prison.

### **1.3.3 The role of prison: punishment versus rehabilitation**

The role of prison has been debated for centuries. Up to the mid-18th century deportation, physical torture or execution were the main forms of punishment for offenders who were held in extremely harsh conditions but the penal reforms of John Howard (1726-1790) led to far more offenders being sentenced to confinement in 'humane' conditions and the Penitentiary Act of 1779 called for the commissioning of national penitentiaries. In 1791, Jeremy Bentham designed a blue-print of a prison, called the panopticon, which was based on a model of a factory and allowed for maximum surveillance of its inmates. Although the panopticon was never actually built, this era marked the beginning of the modern prison and many of those old buildings are still in use as prisons today. Also around this time, with the philosophical writings of Bentham and others, classical theories of offender punishment adopted a utilitarian approach to crime, and its causes. The notion of rehabilitation, rather than punishment, came to prominence. There was a challenge to the concept of crime being an individual's free will and a shift away from models of retribution and deterrence towards social welfare and the medical model (Hollin and Bilby, 2007), which was based on theories which portrayed criminal deviance as an illness that could be cured, and has influenced the 20th century prison.

The medical model was popular until the 1970s when Martinson (1974) challenged the evidence holding up the theories in the US and claimed that 'nothing worked' in offender rehabilitation. His essays sparked the move towards a more punitive sentencing strategy which was mostly affected by retribution, rather than by incapacitation or deterrence (see for example Carlsmith, 2006; Ripstein, 1999). Then, after the prison riots in 1990, Lord Justice Woolf (1991) proposed that prisoners should be helped to become responsible members of society and some reforms followed. However, after the appointment of a new radical Home Secretary in 1993 and the publication of a report on an escape from a high security prison in 1994, there was a

continued move towards tougher and austere prison regimes (Scott, 2007). The aim of the modern prison is currently to protect the public first, then to rehabilitate (Ministry of Justice, 2007). Thus prison is primarily a place of punishment with access to rehabilitation. This dual role causes unresolved tensions (National Audit Office, 2008) and a complex balance between security, control and justice exists. Those who manage prisons have conflicting aims in providing secure containment and a rehabilitative environment (King, 2007).

### **1.3.4 Reoffending and the rehabilitation agenda**

Many prisoners come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds with family breakdowns, school exclusions, drug and alcohol abuse (Ministry of Justice, 2010a; Williams et al., 2012). The high levels of re-offending are considered to be a reflection of difficulties in addressing some of these deep-seated issues which have caused such social exclusion and marginalisation, often from an early age.

The financial cost of this re-offending is high, with each new prison place costing the tax payer £119,000 (including estimated building costs) and annual costs for each prisoner are approximately £40,000 (Matrix Knowledge Group, 2009). Social and psychological costs of re-offending are harder to quantify but it affects most people through the damage it inflicts on the social fabric (Schüller, 2009). Hence, reducing reoffending is a key aim of government and strategies for doing this are constantly being updated. The latest rehabilitation agenda (Ministry of Justice, 2013a) has introduced many ambitious and contested changes. A recent report by the inspectorate (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2013) suggests that prison management was insufficiently organised and doubted that the rehabilitation agenda could be delivered. This thesis reflects the situation for prisoner rehabilitation at the time of the data collection in 2011-2013, noting only those changes which have made a specific difference to participants' lives.

### 1.3.5 Rehabilitation interventions

There has been significant research and debate, especially over the last three decades, about 'what works' to reduce reoffending (Andrews et al., 2011; Aos et al., 2006; Bynner, 2009; Harper and Chitty, 2005; Martinson, 1974). There are a wide variety of prison-based interventions and programmes which are aimed at rehabilitation and reducing reoffending. These programmes include drug rehabilitation, anger management, offending behaviour programmes and cognitive skills programmes. They have different purposes, draw upon different branches of applied psychology and "tend to be targeted more at specific types of offences than at specific types of offenders" (Elliott-Marshall et al., 2005, p47). There is evidence to suggest that some programmes may be effective in dealing with underlying problems and reducing recidivism for some prisoners (Vennard and Hedderman, 1998).

These interventions, which are based on a 'deficit' or 'risk-based' model of offending and consider the offender to be a risk to society or someone who needs to be corrected, have many critics. Cognitive behaviour programmes, in particular, have been high on the political agenda and continue to be heavily used in prisons in England and Wales. They have been criticised for not sufficiently considering the needs of client groups or what would prompt and sustain their desistance from crime ((Vennard and Hedderman, 2009). Reuss and Wilson (2000), argue that although they "may 'work' for some prisoners in some circumstances, the practice and the delivery of the courses seems to ignore the *life-history* and *personal identity* of the prisoner" (emphasis in original, p174). Many prisoners have no choice in whether they attend these programmes since they form part of their sentence plan and prisoners often regard them as target-driven (Clark, 2006). These interventions are frequently the focus of government-backed evaluations to establish their role in reducing reoffending or improving employment prospects.

Duguid (2000b) argues that “lasting change in the form of rehabilitation, reformation or transformation can only occur if individuals are dealt with as subjects and not objects” (p.61). These interventions are imposed on a prisoner as an object but education programmes provide a more 'natural' process of self-transformation as they acknowledge a prisoner as a subject rather than an object.

### **1.3.6 Education in prison**

The purpose of education for prisoners has been, and continues to be, heavily debated. The official view is that it is another intervention which helps to reduce reoffending by providing qualifications and skills for employment on release (HM Government, 2006). This has financial implications as prison education and vocational interventions could save public expenditure of between £2,000 and £28,000 per offender or from £10,500 to £97,000 per offender when victim costs are included (Matrix Knowledge Group, 2009).

The prison service often gives education low priority and considers it to be simply, 'purposeful activity' which keeps the prisoners occupied (Pike, 2010b). A wider view is that education is a basic human right (United Nations, 2009) and that prison education should foster law abiding citizens (Costelloe, 2014). Some countries acknowledge their prisoners as citizens and place more emphasis on education in their prisons. For example, the Nordic countries have incorporated the European Convention on Human Rights into their legislation and provide an education for prisoners comparable to that offered to the general public (Manger and Eikeland, 2009). Education for prisoners in England and Wales is provided mostly through classroom-based learning with a focus on basic literacy and numeracy skills. Unlike the interventions discussed above, education programmes in England and Wales are normally provided by non-uniformed education staff in the Education Department within the prison. Except in private prisons where education contracts may still be owned by the Prison Service, classroom-based

prison education is provided by the Skills Funding Agency's Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS). It contracts Further Education providers to deliver basic literacy, numeracy and life skills (and similar courses up to secondary level) through classroom-based education (HM Government, 2005).

The links between truanting or exclusion from school and crime are well established (Braggins and Talbot, 2003; Flood-Page et al., 2000; Hurry et al., 2010) so it is unsurprising that many prisoners have few qualifications, and may have low levels of literacy and numeracy, when entering prison. The emphasis on these low level qualifications is therefore understandable. However, lack of education does not necessarily mean lack of intelligence and many prisoners progress to higher levels. Also, basic skills alone are not considered adequate to provide prisoners with the skills and qualifications required for sustainable employment and social inclusion (House of Commons, 2005a; National Audit Office, 2008). However, the standard classroom education in adult prisons in England and Wales rarely provides higher-level study options (Owers, 2007; Wilson, 2010).

### ***Prison-based Higher-level Distance Learning (PHDL)***

Most of the higher-level (tertiary) education in prisons is offered through distance learning. This PHDL is outside the funded OLASS education process so applications for it involve a complex screening procedure and prisoners must either fund themselves or apply for funding through charitable trusts such as the Prisoners Education Trust (and, since 2013, Government loans). The Open University with its mission of being open to people, places, methods and ideas (Open University, 2011) is the UK's largest provider of distance learning higher education and is also the largest provider of PHDL. It provides higher education courses to approximately 1700 students across most prisons in the UK (Open University, 2014). Funding for initial Open University access courses is partially subsidized by the Department of Business,

Innovations and Skills through the Prisoners Education Trust's Access to Success fund (Prisoners Education Trust, 2014a). There are, however, many other smaller distance learning providers such as the National Extension College and The Open College of the Arts that provide higher-level courses to prisoners.

As with distance learners generally, distance learners in prison organise their own learning but communication with distance learning providers is complicated by the need to go through an intermediary in the prison. This distance learning coordinator is usually employed by the OLASS contracted education provider or the Careers Information and Advice Service (now the National Careers Service). Distance learners in prison are not allowed access to the Internet so access to distance learning materials and tutors is restricted (see Pike and Adams, 2012). The Open University provides some additional support to its students such as face-to-face or telephone tutorials dependent on course and prison but other distance learning providers rely completely on correspondence material. It is this PHDL, with all its issues, which is the focus of the thesis.

### ***The Virtual Campus***

Technology for learning in prison is gradually improving. Some countries, such as Norway and Germany, now have secure Internet access which enhances prisoners' learning (Prisoners Education Trust, 2014b). In England and Wales new technology comes in the form of the Virtual Campus (see Appendix A), which is not full Internet access but can provide secure access to selected employment and education websites. It has been rolled out to every prison and is intended to streamline and modernise the system of delivery for education, training and employment (Turley and Webster, 2010) as well as to "support providers in offering stimulating and engaging material [for learning]" (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2011, p7). It therefore has the potential to improve access for PHDL students and the Open



University, in particular, have been trialling some introductory courses on its server. There have, however, been problems and delays in the Virtual Campus deployment (Pike and Adams, 2012).

## **1.4 The post-release environment: Resettlement and desistance**

### **1.4.1 Resettlement**

Resettlement is the process whereby prisoners are helped to find accommodation and employment as they are released from prison (House of Commons, 2005b). The process begins in the prison at varying lengths of time before the actual release date, depending on the prisoner's specific needs and their assessed risk to the public on release. The release date itself is also dependent on these issues but many prisoners on determinate sentences are released on license after they have served half of their sentence. They remain on license until the sentence is complete but if they fail to abide by the rules of the license they are recalled to prison to serve the rest of their sentence. These rules are rigidly enforced, many believe largely for political and presentational reasons. (Hedderman and Hough, 2004; Maguire and Raynor, 2006).

Those who are considered at risk to themselves or the public, especially those who come under the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) (see Appendix A), are normally housed in a probation hostel for part, or all, of their license. Some of these hostels are specifically geared towards a particular intervention such as drug or alcohol treatments. NOMS manages the Probation Trusts which employ the Offender Managers who oversee the ex-prisoner on licence after release. Ex-prisoners account for 30 per cent of the Probation staff time. The rest of their time is spent supervising offenders (over 18) who are subject to court orders in the community.

At the time of the current research there were 42 probation areas, divided into the NOMS regions across England and Wales. Communication between the Prison and

Probation Services is through shared reports and sentence plans which include a probability assessment of the ex-prisoner's re-offending based on their assessed risk. The government's plan for reducing reoffending (Home Office, 2004) is outlined by seven pathways that it identifies as contributing to re-offending and that are targeted to help individuals to move away from crime. They are: (1) accommodation, (2) education, training and employment (ETE), (3) health, (4) drugs and alcohol, (5) finance, benefit and debt, (6) children and families and (7) attitudes, thinking and behaviour.

Maguire and Raynor (2006) argue that current resettlement plans are unlikely to reduce reoffending since they do not sufficiently consider individual offenders' cognitive processes or levels of self-motivation which, they suggest, are critical factors for change in the desistance process (see 1.4.2 below). Offender management strategy allocates interventions both in the prison and post-release based on risk, so those who are less risk to the public receive less support. They suggest that up to 1969 there were only a few prisoners released on license and they received relatively good support. However, after 1969 many more prisoners were released and they did not receive adequate support. In the worst case scenario, the released prisoner, especially those on short sentences, may find themselves on the street outside the prison gate with £46 in their pocket, "clutching their personal possessions in a transparent plastic bag" and with nowhere to go (Allen and Stern, 2007, p40). A recent report by the Prison and Probation Inspectorate suggests that there is insufficient information.

Recent developments in the theory of desistance (below) suggest that offender management should not be based on risk since that reinforces the negative component of crime. Rather, offender management should be based around supporting a prisoner's potential for positive change to take control of their lives (McNeill, 2004).

### **1.4.2 Desistance**

Desistance is the process by which criminals give up crime “on their own” (Maruna, 2001, p12). For those who have been involved in crime for many years it may take time and, like giving up smoking, it may take many attempts before it is successful. There have been many different definitions and theories of desistance over recent years. Early theories of desistance focused on the ageing process whereby crime began in delinquent youth and many offenders simply grew out of crime (Farrington, 1986). Matza (1964), argued that age-related theories of crime could not adequately account for the sporadic and often temporary nature of criminality. He suggested that deviance should be viewed as something which individuals could “drift” in and out of during their criminal lifetime. This was consistent with a “zigzag path” between crime and non-crime which was offered by Glaser (1964) to describe typical offending behaviour.

A life-course theory of social control was later proposed by Sampson and Laub (1993), who followed up on delinquents originally studied by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck in the 1930s and 40s (Glueck and Glueck, 1950). Much recent empirical research has developed the theory of desistance and is discussed in chapter 2. Longer term desistance can now be defined in terms of a process of human development which has a personal and a social element and which involves a shift in identity and self-concept (LeBel et al., 2008; McNeill, 2012; McNeill and Weaver, 2010). As such, it can be compared with transformative learning and learners who are transformed by their PHDL may also be able to desist from crime in the longer-term.

## **1.5 Chapter conclusion**

This chapter has introduced the thesis. The rationale for the research was given in section 1.1. The aims of the research (in 1.2) were to investigate the learning journeys of prisoners studying higher-level distance learning, to identify in what ways their learning was transformative and whether it actually made a difference to their lives after

they were released from prison. A brief methodology section highlighted that the research was a qualitative, ethnographic and longitudinal study in three phases and an outline of the thesis has been presented. Section 1.3 provided an introduction to the prison context, by providing a background to the penal system in England and Wales, and set the scene for the rest of the thesis. It discussed the contested functions of prison and confirmed that this thesis focuses on its rehabilitative role but highlights the differences between many of the prison-based interventions which aim to rehabilitate. It has been argued that education is one particularly effective intervention and higher-level distance learning is potentially transformative, hence the focus of this thesis. Section 1.4 introduced the post-release environment, explaining the resettlement process. It emphasised the differences between risk-based interventions aimed at reducing recidivism through a change in behaviour and the desistance process by which prisoners are encouraged to give up crime by shifting their identity and taking control of their lives. Potential links between transformative learning and desistance processes have been suggested. The power of learning and its role in the prison and post prison environment is discussed further in chapter 2.

## Chapter 2: The Power of Learning

*Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use  
to change the world.*

(Mandela, 2003)

### 2.1 Introduction

This thesis investigates the ways in which prison-based higher level distance learning may change adult prisoners' lives. Mandela's quote has been chosen to open this chapter on the power of learning because he knew what it was to be imprisoned for a long time and developed a university within a prison which ultimately changed the lives of many people. This chapter introduces the developing theory of transformative learning as a potential conceptual framework for understanding how adults learn. It then explores the transformative nature of adult learning by critically reviewing adult learning and developmental theories that have developed over recent years, through a transformative learning lens. The same transformative learning lens is then used to critically review the limited empirical research in higher and distance education in the specific context of prison, which leads to the formation of two research questions. Finally, the longitudinal studies which investigate prisoners' lives after release are reviewed, to identify how those lives may have been affected by learning. This enables the second research question to be expanded.

### 2.2 Transformative adult learning

There is no one theory which describes all that is known about adult learning but there is a "mosaic of theories, models, sets of principles, and explanations" (Merriam, 2001, p4) which combine to form a knowledge base of adult learning. One of the first fundamental theories of adult learning was developed by Malcolm Knowles (1984). In this thesis on adult learning for disadvantaged learners in prison, it is fitting that

Knowles (1984) began to develop his theory of andragogy when he was working on a study programme for disadvantaged unemployed youth, who may well have ended up in prison. His theory was based on a set of assumptions of adults, as people who:

1. are independent and can direct their own learning
2. have life experiences which are a rich resource for learning
3. have a readiness for learning which is linked to their stage of development  
(transition between stages could be triggered by a change)
4. require learning which is life-centred rather than subject-centred
5. are motivated to learn through internal factors such as self-esteem, self-confidence and a better quality of life.

(Adapted from Knowles, 1984, p9-12)

From these assumptions Knowles introduced a theory of adult learning which he suggested would improve teaching practice for adults; encouraging teaching in a climate of mutual respect, collaboration, trust, openness, supportiveness and pleasure. His theory was much debated and discussed over the 1970s and 1980s and many questioned whether it was a theory at all, or a set of good teaching practices (Hartree, 1984) or merely a set of assumptions (Brookfield, 1986). Originally Knowles saw andragogy opposed to pedagogy but later, responding to criticism, he suggested that pedagogy and andragogy were on a continuum of different teaching and learning styles from teacher-centred to student-centred. Transformative learning is a theory of adult learning which fits well with Knowles's (1984) assumptions and can provide a conceptual framework for understanding how some adults learn.

Transformative learning can be defined as "a process by which previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values, and perspectives are questioned and thereby become more open, permeable, and better justified" (Cranton, 2006, page vi). The theory of transformative learning was first developed in the United States in 1978 by

Jack Mezirow after he investigated the factors which impeded and facilitated women's progress into higher education through re-entry programmes (Mezirow, 2000b). The findings suggested that the women who participated in the programmes had undergone a perspective transformation in their personal development by becoming more critically aware of their beliefs and feelings about themselves and their role in society. Influenced by Habermas (1984), Mezirow (1991) differentiated between instrumental learning and dialogic (or communicative) learning. He considered instrumental learning to be task-oriented problem-solving for improved performance while dialogic learning involved critically assessing what was being communicated, enabling the learner to recognise unquestioned assumptions and beliefs which they have held since childhood. This could lead to self-reflective learning if the learner is able to internalise the reasons for the new perspective. Self-reflective learning, related to the adult learner's identity, psycho-social history and potential for individual and social change, was fundamental to transformative learning. The self-reflective learner is presented with an alternative way of seeing themselves and the world around them. Self-reflective learning, in itself, was not considered transformational but it could lead to transformation (Brookfield, 2000; Cranton and Hoggan, 2012; Mezirow, 1985, 1997, 2000a).

Mezirow (2000) initially presented 10 phases which transformative learning often followed:

- Disorientating dilemma
- Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
- Critical assessment of epistemic or socio-cultural assumptions
- Recognition of one's discontent and awareness of potential for transformation
- Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions

- Planning a course of action
- Acquisition of skills for implementing those plans
- Provisional trying of new roles
- Building competence and self-confidence in new roles
- Reintegration into society on the basis of one's new perspective

(Adapted from Mezirow, 2000a, p21)

Knowles's (1984) first assumption was that adults were self-directed. Knowles (1984) acknowledged that often adults, when faced with the daunting prospect of learning, reverted to the role of the dependent child. He argued, however, that "if they really are treated like children, this conditioned expectation conflicts with their much deeper psychological need to be self-directing" (p9). Mezirow (1985) suggested that self-direction should be the goal, "the prevailing philosophy of adult education" (p17). However, Tough (1975) has stressed that learners need significant external resources to complete their learning projects and Brookfield (1985), who found that learning often took place in informal settings, suggested that peer support was a crucial condition for success. Brockett and Hiemstra (1985) went further, recommending numerous criteria for successful learning which included respecting themselves as learners, being aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, seeking and taking responsibility for their own learning and controlling their time and space for learning. Many of these criteria may not be available in all learning contexts (in a prison for example).

Agreeing with Knowles's (1984) second assumption, Mezirow's (1997) theory assumed that adults come to learning with preconceptions. He suggested that those preconceptions are within a specific frame of reference developed through their cultural background and life experiences which define the meaning in their world (Mezirow, 1997, p5). Chené (1983), posited that because learners bring their own experiences to



the learning, they require critical thought about alternatives and possibilities. New goals can only be perceived if the learner is aware of their existence and interest in reaching a goal may be reduced if that goal appears inaccessible. Realistic goals are those which come from a person who has an understanding of their own needs, is aware of the alternatives and is free to access those alternatives. It is possible that many prisoners may not be such a person. Mezirow (1985) suggested that freedom could come from critically reflective learning and could lead to transformative learning, enabling that person to see their world in a different way. Research was required to establish if that was possible in a prison context.

In accordance with Knowles's third assumption, adults are expected to be mature and have an awareness of themselves and the world around them. Brookfield (1998), stated that although not all students in adult learning were mature, adult educators treated them as if they were. Developmental psychology models of learning show clearly why not all adult learners are mature or critical thinkers, yet some children may be very mature for their years. Mezirow (2003) proposed that under certain circumstances a perspective transformation could occur where transformative learning moves the learner from a "taken-for-granted frame of reference" (p 59) towards a more discriminating and reflective frame of reference which could fit with their new knowledge and experiences. Transformation was normally a gradual process during which the learner was made aware of alternative perspectives but it may occur suddenly such as in a personal crisis (Mezirow, 1985, 1997). A prison sentence could be just such a personal crisis. However, this does not fully deal with Knowles's readiness issue which was a criticism of Mezirow's theory (see 2.3.3 below).

Transformative learning theory has received considerable criticism over the years. For example, Dirkx (in Dirkx et al., 2006) suggested that Mezirow's view of transformative learning was too narrow as it focused on cognitive learning. Dirkx considered that

transformative learning should be about the whole person, including their inner consciousness. He suggested that Mezirow's 'disorientating dilemma', which Dirkx described as 'epochal', was something that could affect anyone and could spark a transformative change in one's world view. In response, Mezirow (in Dirkx et al., 2006) insisted that transformative learning should also be associated with a cognitive reflection of one's epistemological viewpoint which then prevented it from being a religious or visionary experience.

Taylor (1998, 2007), who reviewed much of the empirical research which investigated transformative learning, found that the theory did not adequately deal with the role of context or the importance of relationships. The catalysts for transformative learning were not well defined. Merriam (2004) questioned the relationship between maturity, cognitive development, socio-economic class and transformative learning. She argued that transformative learning could not be fully developmental since an advanced cognitive level was a necessary pre-requisite for transformative learning to occur. Similarly, Belenky and Stanton (2000), who studied women's epistemological development, found that many of their participants did not have the necessary experience to engage in a critical discourse of the kind described by Mezirow. They suggested that his transformative learning theory provided only the later stage of a longer developmental process (see also 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 below for women's ways of knowing).

### **2.3 Transformative learning as an epistemological developmental process**

Transformative learning is considered to be a developmental process and many studies (cf. Taylor, 1998, 2007), which have investigated transformative learning over time, support this concept. However, the complex way in which students learn and how that learning brings about transformation over time has been much debated. This section reviews theories of epistemological development through a transformative lens.

### 2.3.1 Cognitive development

One of the most influential developmental learning theories was that of Perry (1970). From research into the cognitive development of Harvard University students in the 1950s and 1960s, Perry developed a scheme of intellectual and ethical development. Based on Piaget's stages, Perry (1970) identified a progression of expanding awareness of knowledge over the course of a student's learning life. Perry's (1970) scheme had nine developmental stages which he called 'positions' but he argued that progression through the stages was not uniform or continuous over a single student's learning. The stages or positions are organised into three divisions of dualism, relativism and commitment.

Perry's (1970) scheme was the first example of a stage theory of epistemological development and it focused on university (US college) students (see Richardson, 2013, for a fuller discussion). It suggests increasingly complicated ways in which learners perceive authority and much research has used the model as a basis for identifying how students move through the stages and how they can best be supported. The generalisability of Perry's (1970) scheme has been called into question since his participants were from Harvard University and were hence an 'elite' set of students in a particular age range and far from the type of student who would generally be found in prison. Particular criticism surrounded the fact that Perry's participant sample was predominantly male and hence was potentially not generalisable. Belenky et al. (1986) conducted similar research to Perry (1970), with 135 female student participants in health clinics. They developed a different model of cognitive development which was based on five specific women's ways of knowing but they did not include any men in their sample so laid them open to a similar criticism to that faced by Perry (1970).

However, Baxter Magolda (2004) who originally worked at the Kohlberg Institute (see 2.3.2), conducted research including both men and women over a period of more than

16 years. She developed a model of epistemological development which contained four stages or domains: absolute knowing, transitional knowing, independent knowing and contextual knowing and fit with the accounts of both men and women, although there were qualitative gender differences in the patterns of reasoning for the first 3 development stages (for a discussion see Richardson, 2013). Transformative learning theory does not adequately explain the different ways of knowing and relationships highlighted by these cognitive developmental models and additional methods were required to enable “silenced” learners to have a voice (Belenky and Stanton, 2000, p82). Most of the women in their study had at least one parent who was violent and another parent who was compliant. Many women in prison may have had similar parentage.

Merriam (2004) argued that although transformative learning requires the learner to be able to critically self-reflect and engage in critical discourse (Mezirow, 1997), the learner needs to be at a higher cognitive level to be able to critically self-reflect or engage in that critical discourse in the first place. Responding to Merriam, Mezirow (2004) acknowledged that higher-level cognitive functioning may well be required for full potential to engage in transformative learning. Although, he emphasised that the aim of adult education should be to encourage adult learners to “acquire the insight, ability and disposition to realize this potential in their lives” (Mezirow, 2004, p69).

Brookfield (1998) had also argued that the adult education process should strive to encourage students to engage in critical thinking in order to develop alternative perspectives and integration but warned of caution in interpreting stage and phase theories of learning. He suggested that adults often described a rhythmic fluctuation of learning such as “two steps forward, one step back, followed by four steps forward, one step back” (Brookfield, 1998, p296) so did not always move forward at the required rate. However, Taylor (2007) highlighted findings from many researchers which

suggested that transformative learning was developmental and proposed that further research should explore the assumptions of cognitive development and transformative learning. Brookfield (2005) also stressed the importance of power relations in a critical discourse and suggested a need to study “how adults learn to recognise that they are themselves agents of power” (p145). The prison context, with its complex web of power, is therefore a good place to carry out such research.

### **2.3.2 Moral development**

Another influential developmental theory from the 1970s which can be used to define adult learning is moral development. Through findings from an empirical, longitudinal (20-year) study with US men who responded to moral dilemmas, Kohlberg (1977) defined six stages of moral development. These were based on the assumption that the stages were defined as a different way of responding to a specific function. The first two moral stages (1 and 2) were at the pre-conventional level and were associated with child-like responses to rules and regulations. The next two stages (3 and 4) were at the conventional level which values others regardless of immediate consequences, supports and maintains social order, and identifies group members. Kohlberg (1977) suggested that most adults function at stage 4, ‘law and order’. The final two stages (5 and 6) were at the post-conventional level which holds moral values and principles regardless of authority and stage 5 is the level at which western society’s democratic systems should function.

Kohlberg (1977) maintained that most people could not understand more than one stage higher than the stage at which they function. Therefore, assuming that the majority of the public live by moral code stage 4, they may be able to appreciate stage 5, but would be unable to envisage the last stage 6. However, as all of Kohlberg’s data for stage 6 came from interviews with male moral thinkers aged over 30, such as Martin Luther King, it was not considered to be a realistic stage for ‘normal’ people. He

found that conventional morality did not come into question until students were at college and began to appreciate that all values were relative to a subjective view of the world. Duguid (1981) maintained that a lot of prisoners were only at or below stage 3 but he suggested that there were also some at stage 4 and even stage 5.

Kohlberg's theory was based on the experiences of himself, his peers and students who, he claimed, had developed personally through these stages throughout their graduate studies (Kohlberg, 1977). Kohlberg therefore suggested that as higher moral stages were considered to be better stages and that development through the stages was based on maturation and experience, then these moral stages could be used to define adult education. Transformative learning requires emotional maturity which includes self-awareness, empathy and control (Mezirow, 2000a). This would be consistent with a post-conventional, autonomous and principled level of moral development and would therefore not be considered before study at college level (Kohlberg, 1977).

As with Perry's (1970) scheme, Kohlberg's (1977) theory was also heavily criticized for being designed from studies on only men and it was found to be inadequate to explain women's development (Belenky and Stanton, 2000). For example, Gilligan (1977) studied women who were dealing with serious moral dilemmas in their lives and when she tried to use Kohlberg's theory to map it onto her participants' experiences, she found that it did not fit well. She found a different voice which was not apparent in the male voices of Kohlberg's (1977) research. She called it the "ethic of care" (Gilligan, 1982, p174). This 'ethic of care' was considered to be a very important voice which belonged to those who had to consider subordinates, immature or vulnerable others in their moral decisions (Belenky and Stanton, 2000). The 'women's ways of knowing' study mentioned above (in 2.3.1) followed Gilligan's lead and searched for a similar voice in Perry's (1970) research.

According to Duguid (1981), Kohlberg insisted that justice (moral reasoning) could only be taught in 'just' schools. Duguid (1981) suggested that this was a specific challenge for learning in prison as the prison was fundamentally unjust and created an environment which functioned at stages 1 and 2. In order to develop a school which could function at a higher level, he "created an island within the prison, an area in which all Kohlbergian stages above Stage 2 were operational or possible" (Duguid, 1981, p154). This is discussed further in 2.6.1 (below).

### **2.3.3 Conceptions of learning**

The developmental theories of Perry and Kohlberg (above) were developed in the United States. A few years later in Europe, research was carried out in the same field but with a slightly different emphasis. The quality of learning in higher education was investigated and was also thought to be developmental. Results from interview-based research with campus-based students in Sweden suggested that students adopted different approaches to studying depending on the content, context and assessment demands of particular tasks. Marton (1976) found that these approaches were constrained or facilitated by the students' conceptions of learning, and their conceptions of themselves as learners. This idea was elaborated by Säljö (1979b) who identified five conceptions of learning in a similar study. They were: increase of knowledge; memorizing; acquisition of facts for re-use; abstraction of meaning and interpretative process aimed at understanding reality. Säljö (1979a) described his first two conceptions as 'reproductive' and the last two conceptions as 'reconstructive' and suggested that some students appeared to be undergoing a transition in their conceptions.

All the above studies were with students at conventional educational institutes but Marton et al. (1993), independently, categorised a small group of distance learning students with six conceptions of learning in a longitudinal study over 6 years. The first

five were similar to those of Säljö (1979a) but their sixth conceptions, 'changing as a person' was seen only during the later years of study and only among those students who already saw things differently. This suggested that the conceptions were indeed developmental. McClean (2001) proposed that the latter three conceptions, which Säljö (1979a) had termed "reconstructive", were in fact "transformative" (McClean, 2001, p399). Entwistle and Peterson (2004) highlighted similarities between Säljö (1979a) and Perry (1970), showing potential pivotal points at which learning could equate with understanding, and ultimately become transformational. However, distance learners' conceptions of learning and conceptions of selves as learners were influenced by contextual, social and cultural conditions which may not be developmental ((Makoe et al., 2008; Richardson, 2000; Richardson, 2013). The prison environment may be a particularly influential context which requires further research.

Fuller (2007) has suggested that mature students tend to have lower socio-economic backgrounds with fewer qualifications from school yet part-time distance learning requires considerable self-motivation and self-direction. Distance learning students tended to exhibit deeper, more 'meaning-directed', approaches to learning but this was thought to be due to their age (Richardson et al., 1999). Jelfs et al. (2009) found that distance learners had different ideas from their tutors about what 'good' tutoring looked like. Students perceived the need for more support with social interaction, than did the tutors, although results varied across disciplines. They stressed, however, that help and guidance to cope with the demands of this type of study were valuable and both students and tutors would benefit from greater understanding of the need for support to facilitate learning. It is not, however, known whether such support may be offered to distance learning students in a prison.

Taylor (2000), drawing on Kegan's (1994) model of "transformations of consciousness" (p 35), suggested that learners who took a deep approach to learning, who focused on



meaning, were more likely to develop a deeper understanding of themselves and hence more likely to have the potential for transformative learning. With colleagues (see Taylor et al., 2000), she conducted research into how developmentally focused adult educators could best encourage deep, and therefore potentially transformative, learning. They found that the learners were drawn towards deep learning in a developmental process through forms of experiential learning (see also Kolb and Kolb, 2005) and they presented a list of characteristics which were grouped into five dimensions: knowing as a dialogical process; a dialogic relationship with oneself; being a continuous learner; self-agency and self-authorship; connection with others. Self-authorship was also central to Baxter-Magolda's (2004) developmental theories (see Barber et al. (2013)) and she explained that "becoming the author of one's life meant taking responsibility for one's beliefs, identity, and relationships" (Baxter Magolda, 2004, p40). This was in line with Mezirow's concept of transformative learning and helped adults realise their potential for becoming more liberated, socially responsible and autonomous learners.

Taylor (2000) suggested that transformation could leave adults extremely vulnerable and criticized Mezirow's model of transformative learning for a lack of attention to the emotional and psychological costs of transformation. These negative effects of transformative learning were especially important when considering learners' readiness for learning. Kegan (1994) also considered readiness for learning. While discussing a reading exercise which Perry used to encourage undergraduates at Harvard to read 'differently', Kegan highlighted the need to ensure that a student's bridge, from one developmental stage to another, was securely anchored before they attempted to walk across. He explained the "understandable terror" as they "make their first tentative moves onto the bridge" (p280). Since prisoners may already vulnerable, with low self-efficacy (as defined by Bandura, 1977), with previous negative experiences of school

and potentially lower stages of development (Duguid, 1981), they could be especially susceptible to issues of readiness for learning.

In discussing transformative learning, Kegan (2000) asked the question, “what “form” transforms?” (p35) or in other words, what is transformed in transformative learning? In so doing, he made key links between transformative learning and the developmental learning theories (above). Agreeing with (Belenky and Stanton, 2000) he defined Mezirow’s theory as the end point of a long epistemological developmental process defined by numerous others. As has been discussed in this thesis, many researchers have provided detailed theories of the way learners develop through their learning and how they learn. Kegan (2000) argued that unlike “informative” learning, which may similarly involve knowledge, confidence, self-perception, motives and self-esteem, “transformative” learning also reconstructed the epistemological frame of reference, or way of knowing (p 49-50). Thus he suggested that the form which was transformed by transformative learning was, in fact the “epistemology” (p 52). Illeris (2013) disagreed, suggesting that the form that transformed was the learner’s identity.

## **2.4 Transformative learning and Identity**

Mezirow’s view of transformative learning was based on cognitive and developmental psychology and involved constructing a new frame of reference which fits better with the learner’s new knowledge (Mezirow, 1997). Each individual comes to their learning with their own cultural background with individual moral and spiritual beliefs, making up their identity and colouring how they see their world. According to transformative learning theory, constructing a new frame of reference involves questioning those beliefs, discussing with others and beginning to see things in a different way. Since everyone sees the world through their own eyes and their own psychological predisposition then, given the opportunity, they would reconstruct their frame of reference in a different way (Cranton, 2000). Mezirow rarely used the term ‘identity’ but

stressed that transformative learning had a personal and a social element. It involved developing an awareness of self as an individual (personal identity) with regard to others (social identity).

Illeris (2013) considered Mezirow's definition of transformative learning was too narrowly focused on cognitive learning and, agreeing with Taylor (2000), suggested that it did not adequately take account of the emotional dimension of learning. In an earlier model of learning, Illeris (2003) identified two different types of learning, an internal psychological process which denoted traditional behaviourist and cognitive learning, and an external interaction process which denoted social learning and depended on place and time. He defined three different dimensions to the learning: cognitive (content); emotional (motivation); and social (interaction), which he suggested were inextricably linked. Illeris (2013) defines identity as a psycho-social concept (after Erikson, 1968) which included how one is experienced by oneself as well as how one is experienced by others. Giddens defined self-identity as "the self as it is reflexively understood" and "[t]o be a 'person' is not just to be a reflexive actor, but to have a concept of a person (as applied both to the self and others)" (Giddens, 1991, p53). These are translated in this thesis as a personal and social identity. Illeris then redefined transformative learning as comprising "all learning that implies change in the identity of the learner" (2013, p40). He suggested this was a much fuller but simpler definition of transformative learning and encompassed Mezirow's definition with respect to the cognitive changes but also added an emotional and a social element.

Wenger (1998) defines identity as a "layering of events of participation and reification [making an abstract object real or concrete] by which our experience and its social interpretation inform each other" (p151). He argued that membership of a community of practice may not carry a label but identity was formed through participation in that community as well as reification and so identity comes from just belonging to a

community. He defines the 3 dimensions of identity: mutuality of engagement (we become who we are by knowing how to interact in the community), accountability to an enterprise (being a member of the community enables us to make choices and engage in the way of the community) and negotiability of repertoire (a personal set of events and memories with regard to the community). He identifies identity in practice as:

- lived (an experience, more than a label or trait)
- negotiated (a becoming, ongoing and pervasive)
- social (belonging to a community gives us identity)
- learning process (a complex trajectory in time with no beginning and no end)
- nexus (the interaction of multiple convergent and divergent trajectories)
- local-global interplay (a combination of local or global)

From Wenger (1998, p163).

Illeris (2013) criticised this definition of identity, suggesting it was only the social element of identity and lacked a core which was the personal identity.

None of these definitions of identity may be suitable for transformative learning in a prison context. On entering a total institution (Goffman, 1968), prisoners lose their home, their possessions and their very identity as a person to become just a number. Numerous researchers have emphasised the dehumanising experience of prison (cf. de Viggiani, 2007; Jewkes, 2002; Liebling, 2007; Sykes, 1958). Maruna et al. (2006) suggested that "prison provides a stark and vivid social context for exploring the conditions that allow for quantum personality change" (p163). In their study of 75 prisoner-to-religion converts, they posited that religion could give prisoners a new social identity to replace their criminal label, empowering them with a language and framework for forgiveness, which gave them more control over their future. Perhaps transformative learning could do something similar. Jewkes (2002) suggested that prisoners needed to maintain a private, pre-prison, identity while also having a public

identity which they would use in socializing with others in the prison, enabling them to be able to revert to a pre-prison identity when they were released. This relates to the “front region” and “back region or backstage” of the individual’s everyday performance, developed by (Goffman, 1969, p93 and 97). Similarly, Burnett and Maruna (2006) postulated that one of the survival mechanisms for coping in prison was for inmates to obscure their personality in order to blend in and avoid drawing attention to themselves.

These examples highlight the extreme prison environment which is thought to exaggerate every-day life experiences and thus make prisoners potentially more open to change, to develop a new personal and social identity, and see the world in a different way. None of these examples used the concept of transformative learning. There is therefore significant scope for further research to investigate the links between transformative learning and the development of personal and social identity in a prison context.

## **2.5 Transformative learning and context: social and situated learning**

Learning may transform our identity but who we are and what we are is also dependent upon the context in which we learn. Although the perspective that learners bring to their learning shapes what they perceive and what they do, the context is the important determinant in how they learn (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). One of the fundamental criticisms of Knowles’s theory was related to its lack of attention to learning context (Merriam, 2001). Similarly transformative learning theory has been criticised for its lack of attention to the role of context and social change (Taylor, 1998,

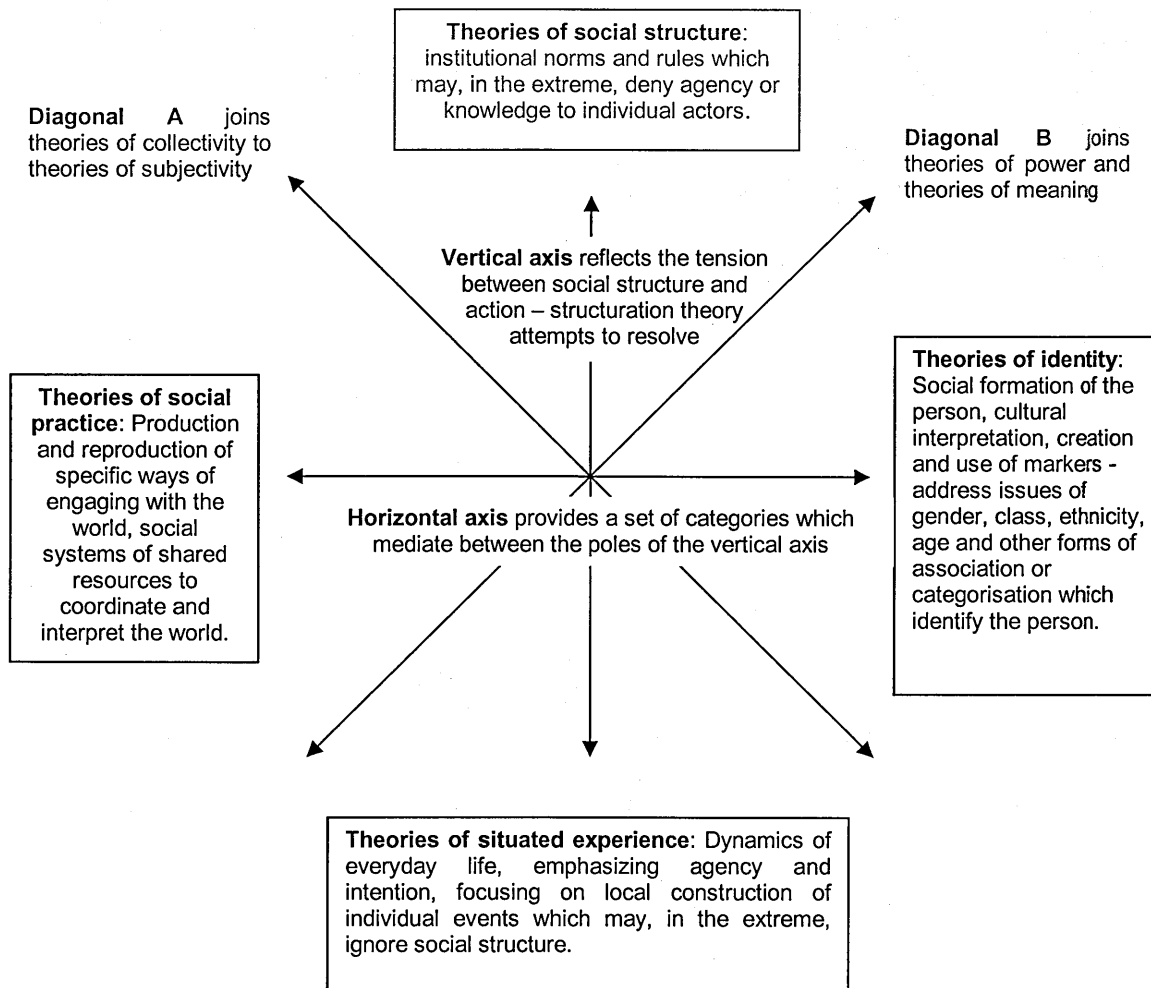
2007). This section therefore reviews social and situated learning theory with a transformative lens.

There are a great many influential social learning theories such as activity theory (Engeström, 2001), cognitive theories (Vygotsky, 1978) and behavioural theories (Bandura, 1977). Lave and Wenger (1991) proposed learning as a social relationship; as learners become more competent they move from “legitimate peripheral participation” into full participation (p37). Learning is seen less as an acquisition of knowledge and more as a process of social participation within a community in which the situation or context has a significant impact. They considered learning to be about the whole person and to understand learning it was necessary to understand the situation within which it was embedded. The limitation of situated learning theory was its failure to recognise the pedagogical value of development and change so it overlooked those learners who belonged to multiple communities. For example, those who needed to study higher education while working full-time in the general community (Fuller, 2007) or in a prison environment (Pike and Adams, 2012).

The social aspect of the context shapes how the world is interpreted around an individual. Social learning theory (Wenger, 1998) takes the perspective that learning is a social phenomenon which is part of human nature. Figure 2.1 is an expanded version of Wenger’s visual representation of social learning theory. The vertical axis highlights the tension between social structure and the individual dynamics of everyday life (agency). Giddens (1984) developed the theory of structuration in an attempt to explain the structure-agency duality. He asserted that structure was “both constraining and enabling” (p25) in its effect on human actors and could be out of their control. However, the varying structure and rules under which the actions occur are not permanent and external, but sustained and modified by human action. Fundamental to structuration theory is motivation which is a feature of human agency. Giddens (1984)

“distinguish[es] the reflexive monitoring and rationalisation of action from its motivation” (p 6). He considered that the reason for continuing something was not the same as the motive which prompted it to start and once that something had occurred, continuation was not motivation but reflexive monitoring and rationalisation.

In psychological terms intrinsic motivation is related to the internal desire to engage in an activity for its own sake whereas extrinsic motivation is related to external and contextual factors. Ryan and Deci (2000b) postulated a taxonomy of several different types of motivation along a continuum which varies with relative autonomy and self-awareness. They classed fully extrinsic motivation as “amotive” (p72). They then identified a set of four progressively internalised types of extrinsic motivation leading towards fully intrinsic motivation. They suggested that autonomy facilitated internalisation and was critical for intrinsic motivation. They stressed that the taxonomy was not developmental but internalisation may increase with maturation and cognitive awareness. This theory may have implications for transformative learning, especially when considering motivation for distance learning in a closed prison environment where autonomy may be stifled.



**Figure 2.1: Social theory of learning**

(adapted from Wenger 1998, p12-15)



The horizontal axis in Figure 2.1 links theories of social practice to theories of identity and provides a set of categories which mediate between structure and agency. Of particular note is Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice which introduced the concept of habitus. Habitus is a difficult and contested concept (Nash, 1999) but it can be considered as a form of capital, developed over time from tacit knowledge, which is learnt through experiencing situations and watching others. Habitus causes "an individual agent's practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to appear sensible and reasonable" (Bourdieu, 1977, p79) and thus affects future actions and decisions. Bottoms et al. (2004) drew upon Bourdieu's habitus to argue that, like giving up smoking, desistance from crime was a lot harder than first beginning crime and could not be considered outside the social context in which it occurred.

Diagonal B in Figure 2.1 joins theories of power and theories of meaning as any attempt to deal with a social structure must also consider issues of power which can be seen as a feature of the duality of structure (Giddens, 1984, p15). Power was central to Wenger's social theory and he considered all forms of power, not simply domination, oppression and violence, but also consensual models where power is contractual and "pervasive forms of discipline sustained by discourses which define knowledge and truth" (Wenger, 1998, p284). These forms of power, along with physical coercion, financial bribery and even the withholding of resources may all be relevant in specific contexts such as a prison. Mezirow (1997) suggested that facilitation of transformative learning also required educators to ensure that learners had full access to information; were free from coercion and had equal opportunity to assume the various roles of discourse. Research is required to establish if such access is available to learners in a prison context.

Moore (2005) insisted that higher education institutes do not adequately consider the implications of transformative learning so rarely provide sufficient support for the

discourse required. However, Garrison and Kanuka (2004), who investigated the transformative potential of blended learning approaches in higher education (in Canada), argued that the Internet information and communication tools provided a flexibility of time and place which allowed for transformative discourse. They suggested that the transformative quality of blended learning “stems from the ability of online learners to be both together and apart - and to be connected to a community of learners anytime and anywhere, without being time, place, or situation bound” (p 96). They also argued that a sense of community was vital to maintain the educational experience over time and to move students to higher levels of thinking. Online learning is not an option in a prison context (Pike and Adams, 2012) and there is very little research which specifically investigates the transformative potential of higher education programmes in any context.

Diagonal A, in Figure 2.1, highlights the duality of the social (collective) and the individual (subjective). The theories regarding this dualism are drawn upon by Bloomer (2001) in describing findings from a 4 year longitudinal study of 50 young people entering Further Education. He drew upon theory of the participatory process of meaning-making (making sense of an experience), symbolic interactionism with situated learning theory (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and the concept of habitus (as above). In so doing, he explained young people’s transformations through learning as subtle, irregular, unpredictable and multi-dimensional, stressed the relationship between learning and identity and emphasised “learning as a situated, generative and participative social practice” (Bloomer, 2001, p 444).

Context therefore has implications at an individual as well as at a social level. Transformative learning is fostered within a supportive learning environment and Mezirow’s (1997) theory does not adequately account for this. For example, Courtenay et al. (1998) studied how people with HIV made sense of their lives. They found that a

'catalytic' event, either external or internal, appeared to help individuals move away from their old assumptions and towards a "readiness" for transformative learning. They found that external catalytic events came from support groups involving significant others such as family, counsellors or mentors. Prison learners may also have such support groups but there is currently a lack of research literature on prison learners' readiness for learning.

The social dimension of transformative learning can also have negative effects since cultural and socio-economic structures may impede the process of transformation and the development of personal agency (Mezirow, 2000). This was amply recognised by Morrice (2012) in her longitudinal study of asylum seekers who were studying higher education. She suggested that learning to be a refugee was a negative transformative learning experience through the realisation that despite being highly qualified in their birth country, they had to deconstruct their former identity in the face of hostility and racism. Cultural and socio-economic structures within the prison and post-prison environment could have similar negative effects.

These examples have illustrated the scope for further research to investigate the links between transformative learning in specific contexts and how the structural and the social aspect of that context may help or hinder the transformative learning process. Distance learning is one particular educational context "which is ripe for greater research" with regard to transformative learning (Taylor, 2007, p175). The following section (2.6) reviews some research literature in the specific context of prison and section 2.7 reviews some of the research literature in the post-prison environment.

## **2.6 Transformative learning and the prison context**

This section reviews the empirical research literature which investigates learning in the specific context of prison. With only 1% of the funded curriculum in prison at a higher, post-secondary, level (Prisoners Education Trust, 2012), it is rarely seen in the prison classroom in England and Wales, let alone researched. However the prison's education department features heavily in the distance learners' journey so this section firstly reviews a few studies which investigated the benefits and the barriers of basic study in prison (2.6.1). The specific literature which explored higher level study is then reviewed, providing insight into the potential for transformative learning in the prison classroom (2.6.2) as well as through distance learning (2.6.3).

### **2.6.1 Education in prison**

Much literature has portrayed the education department in prison as a more positive environment than the rest of the prison. Wilson (2007), who completed several ethnographies investigating literacy and numeracy for young people in prison, identified the education department as a "third space" which "offers a space where a prisoner can be transformed into a student" (p 199-200). Crewe et al. (2014) portrayed the education department as an 'emotion zone', one of several caring places within a prison which allowed prisoners to show their emotions and have some respite, temporarily, before going back to the "reality of imprisonment" on the wing (p. 68). Reuss and Wilson (2000) suggested that education in prison at any level could provide prisoners with more choice and control.

A recent study of education for young people (under 25) in six custodial settings (two were high security) in London by Hurry et al. (2012) found that most staff thought that a holistic approach to education in prison was necessary. They believed it was important to develop the learning skills and self-image of their prisoner learners in order for them to develop their self-esteem. However, they believed that the Skills Funding Agency's

emphasis on targeted qualifications reduced options for developing such softer skills. They found that the education provision failed to adequately identify individual needs and developments of its learners. They highlighted that much of the good work was carried out by individuals who worked “in an atmosphere of good will and cooperation, often in spite of rather than because of prevailing regimes” (p28). Their study did not focus on higher level learning but some of the prisons in which they interviewed staff, did provide higher level options.

The ICT infrastructure in the prison education department was found to be good but most staff needed training to use the Virtual Campus (Hurry et al., 2012; Pike and Adams, 2012). Although the Internet was not available, some establishments provided good intranets which enabled loading and sharing of resources. Pike and Adams (2012) suggested that this mostly occurred in the higher security prisons, although Hurry et al. (2012) did not specify. Educational assessment varied across prisons but appeared to work best if the induction was longer and when learners were able to choose their education shortly after induction. Hurry et al. (2012) provided several good practice examples of improved education or useful enrichment activities. These were through a positive prison-wide ethos where prison and education staff had a good relationship and worked together on a daily basis. These perceptions of a prison with a learning ethos and whose staff worked together were consistent with the concept of a ‘learning’ prison which was proposed from my MRes findings (see 2.6.3 and Pike and Adams, 2012).

### **2.6.2 Higher education in the prison classroom**

There are two examples of research studies of higher education in the English prison classroom. The first is Reuss’s (1997, 1999) ethnography of long-term prisoners in a maximum security dispersal prison, studying higher education in a classroom environment. The ‘Leeds Course’ ran successfully in an English prison from 1989 until

funding was withdrawn in 1998. Through six, twelve-week modules it provided prisoners with an opportunity to obtain a diploma in Social Studies. Reuss gathered field-notes of classroom interactions and discussions over four years. She observed a 'change' in some prisoners through the learning experience but explained how difficult it was to articulate precisely what that change was. Some students thought it was the subject matter which had "made them think differently", other students had said that the course had "opened up whole new fields of knowledge and opportunity", yet others believed that the social aspects of learning were of greatest benefit to them (Reuss, 1999, p117).

Reuss (1997) found that the education was a form of empowerment, enabling prisoners to maintain a degree of choice and control. Her findings took the form of narrative from the prison students and suggested that they were anxious to preserve a positive self-identity. The identity change observed over time, was in direct opposition to the undermining effect of imprisonment, and she suggested that it was likely to be carried with them on release. However, her study did not follow the students' learning journey upon release from prison and she was unable to establish if their learning made any difference to their lives after prison.

The second research study of higher education in the prison classroom in England was Crewe et al. (2014). They posited that the philosophy class in an English prison provided mental and emotional release from the general prison environment in which emotions were kept tightly controlled. They suggested that the educational activities were "intensely personal" and that achievements were "owned" by the individual prisoners such that they could "forge a space that was comparatively free from the oppressive oversight of their peers on one side and the institution on the other" (p 70). Crewe et al. (2014) therefore argued that the prison space was not just physical or architectural but it is about what activity occurred in that space, who inhabited that

space and what that meant to the prisoner. They did not, however, specifically consider the effect of the learning or the learning community on the prisoner, whether that learning was transformative or how it might affect the learners' life after release.

Internationally, there is more research on higher-level study in the prison classroom. One particular programme in Canada, the Simon Fraser programme, ran for 20 years with University staff providing higher education in four prisons for more than 2000 prisoners (Duguid, 1981, 2000a, b; Duguid and Pawson, 1998). The programme was originally set up as an experiment to test whether traditional liberal arts programmes could lead to cognitive and moral development in student-inmates and if that development resulted in reduced reoffending on release. The theory behind the experiment was based on Kohlberg's stages of moral theory (see 2.3.2) and assumed that prisoners had moral reasoning deficits. Although based on a deficit model, the university were very keen for it to be different to other interventions based on behaviour therapy, so the programme did not aim to 'change' the inmates, rather it aimed to help them to develop and grow through education.

A major problem in setting up the programme was related to Kohlberg's insistence that teaching of justice required a "just" school whereas the prison was seen as unjust and authoritarian by the inmates. Thus they created "an island within the prison... and after several years of experimentation a form of just community was created" (Duguid, 1981, p153-4). The degree program, which was in the humanities and social sciences, was extremely successful, attracting approximately 20% of the prison population. As with education departments in England and Wales, the staff were employed by the education provider (in that case the university) so were outside the prison regime and the relationship between staff and student was specifically non-authoritarian.

The programme was evaluated (see 2.7) and the follow-up studies indicated that development of moral reasoning was often at quite dramatic rates. Duguid (1981)

suggested that it was the combination of the geographical distance of the island learning community from the prison as well as the higher-level learning which introduced an alternative reality which was clearly an environment which could foster transformative learning (although Duguid did not use the term). The programme was closed down eventually as the cognitive skills theory proponents won the day and the Canadian Prison Service decided they no longer wanted the education to be run by “outsiders” (Duguid, 2000b, p59).

Making comparisons with international studies requires caution as the concept of education in prison differs across different countries and cultures. However, this was a large and successful programme which merited consideration. Also, the accounts of Reuss (1997) and Duguid (1981) were very similar, emphasising how transformative learning could be fostered in prison through a positive, collaborative, higher-level learning environment where prisoners could develop personally, socially and morally. However, such programmes are rare and, despite their apparent success, were closed down. Research is needed to identify if similar transformative learning could be fostered through distance learning, which is the current main delivery method for higher-level learning in prisons in England and Wales.

### **2.6.3 Prison-based Higher-level Distance Learning (PHDL)**

There is very little empirical research into PHDL in England and Wales. Early pioneering work by Forster (1976, 1996, 1998) was carried out when PHDL was in its infancy and his findings provided a good indication of the benefits and barriers to distance learning in prison. His methodology was a little haphazard. He visited five prisons (two were high security) and interviewed 53 inmates in a variety of ways, which included small group (2-3 inmate) interviews, larger groups (8-9 inmate) interviews and some individual interviews. He highlighted differences in the prisons and found that



PHDL was best facilitated when there was a dedicated member of staff to deal with it or where there were a lot of part-time third sector staff who could help.

Forster found that PHDL changed learners but that the change could be “intense and painful” (Forster, 1976, p31). Emphasising the benefits of PHDL, he stressed that all of his participants became distanced from the negative aspects of prison life. However, he also suggested that those with poor educational backgrounds were alienated from their family and social background as well, which he perceived as a potential social problem. He found that those with lower previous educational qualifications suffered unusual levels of stress in assessment, and failure was associated with “a very lengthy feeling of depression”, (Forster, 1976, p23). He highlighted the problem of isolation and that the student most seriously affected by academic isolation was the one who was ill-prepared for PHDL because of previous lack of experience in higher-level study. He suggests that unless checked, this “could make education a narrowing rather than a broadening experience and could certainly add to the intensity and tension of the academic experience.” (p27). He also suggested there were discrepancies between distance learning provision in different prisons and that some participants appeared misinformed about how much face to face support they could expect. While his study was more than 30 years ago, in a more recent case study to investigate the barriers to PHDL, Watts (2010) underlined the value of one-to-one tutorial support to facilitate learning.

In another recent study, Hughes (2006, 2007, 2012) conducted a short-answer questionnaire (76 responses) and in-depth interviews with 47 distance learners of varying educational levels in nine adult prisons (one women’s prison) in England during the period 2001-2003. She focused on motivation and experiences of distance learning in prison and found that although many participants were motivated to study through a desire to improve their chances for employment after release, others saw education as

a means of using their time in prison constructively and countering the more negative aspects of prison. She argued that the motives for beginning or continuing education were 'multi-dimensional' and not easily categorised, but she suggested that a positive, dynamic, environment could increase confidence and encourage prisoners to progress their education. Disagreeing with Forster (1976), she found that PHDL helped prisoners to develop relationships with their families, by making them proud or connecting better with their children. She suggested that the benefits from PHDL potentially provided prisoners with improved chances for employment and other life chances on release. She attempted to follow-up some of her participants and did ultimately interview two released prisoners but her methods for doing so were vague and she did not complete a longitudinal study (Hughes, 2012, footnote p165-6).

Jupp (2010), like Hughes, found complex motivations to study. Her small-scale ethnographic study of PHDL students in a high security men's prison in England investigated the relationship between educational achievement and changes in personal and social identity. She found relatively good support for PHDL in the high security prison but organisational constraints created problems and participants felt isolated in their studies, so timely encouragement was found to be crucial for success. Her participants also "showed their enthusiasm in being part of 'the academy', and their belonging and connection to a world outside, literally and metaphorically" (p 69). As her participants were all long-term prisoners and not imminently due for release, there was no question of follow-up of her participants post-release.

Although these researchers all stressed the benefits of PHDL such as increased confidence, skills, qualifications, self-esteem and self-efficacy (Forster, 1976; Hughes, 2007; Jupp, 2010), they also provided insight into some of the specific challenges for distance learners in prison and differences in support for learning across prisons. Prison-based policy and regime difficulties highlighted the conflict between security and

education. Distance learners needed to maintain resilience and determination in order to overcome the challenges (Hughes, 2012). Wilson (2010, p29) has also argued that prisoners need “a special kind of persistence” to conduct distance learning in prison. Her ethnographic study in one local category B prison identified a lack of practical information to enable level 2 learners to progress to high level study. She found that staff had to work against the system to support distance learners and there was a need for more support which focused on the needs of higher-level distance learners. She highlighted differences between the local category B prison and the better coordinated support in the more stable high security prisons.

Consistent with Hughes (2012) and Wilson (2010), my previous (MRes) research found conflicting institutional and cultural attitudes impacting on the distance learners' experiences which varied substantially across the different prisons (Pike and Adams, 2012). I proposed the concept of a 'working' prison and a 'learning' prison as two ends of a whole spectrum of different prisons and learning environments. A '*learning*' prison was described as one with a learning culture and very good support for PHDL whereas a '*working*' prison, at the other end of the spectrum, had a working culture with very little space or time for learning (see glossary in Appendix A). In reality, prisons were found to be extremely complex environments with a multitude of different priorities and their level of support for PHDL was somewhere between these two extreme concepts. Consistent with Jupp (2010), the high security prisons which held long-term prisoners were often found at the 'learning' end of the spectrum. Although these findings suggested the potential for identity re-formation across the spectrum, a 'learning' prison (one at the 'learning' end of the spectrum) was considered most likely to provide better leverage for transformative learning. A 'working' prison (one at the 'working' end of the spectrum) may, however, become the norm since recent penal reforms have operated on the principle that prisoners should learn a working ethos and prisons should become places of hard work (Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2011; Ministry of

Justice, 2013a). These concepts of 'learning' and 'working' prison were specifically related to a prison's support for PHDL and did not attempt to categorise prisons as good or bad, or assume knowledge of the complexities of prison management and practices in other aspects of prison activities.

Regardless of prison type, many researchers (Forster, 1976; Hughes, 2007, 2012; Jupp, 2010; Pike, 2010b; Pike and Adams, 2012) agreed that those student-inmates who persevered with their PHDL studies developed a positive student identity, could see things differently, and were changed as a person in some way. They suggested that the student-inmates were developing cognitively and may be changing their perspective on life. PHDL also appeared to encourage a caring element towards their fellow inmates. Hughes (2007) argued that peer mentoring developed a more positive identity which replaced the prisoner identity. She provided numerous examples of how her participants displayed these positive roles. They often became 'listeners' (trained by Samaritans), 'Toe-by-Toe' mentors (a scheme organised by the Shannon Trust to help fellow inmates to read and write) or teaching assistants, which suggested that they were critically aware of their own and others' dispositions, a key element required for transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997).

Prison-based peer mentoring schemes were found to be much appreciated by all concerned but some prisons had vetoed them "because it would give inmates power over other inmates" (Braggins and Talbot, 2003, p35). This perceived fear of empowering prisoners was highlighted by my earliest research with respect to allowed technology in prison (Adams and Pike, 2008a, b). With the increase of online courses which had interactive and collaborative assessments for distance learning, lack of access to the Internet is making PHDL increasingly difficult (Hancock, 2010; Prisoners Education Trust, 2012). My previous studies focused on these technological aspects of PHDL and found that many prisoners were unable to gain access to adequate

resources for study (Pike, 2010a, 2010b; Pike and Adams, 2012). Despite these challenges “the student-inmates remained very positive about the benefits of their learning for future employment and life chances” (Pike and Adams, 2012, p374). Along with most other researchers of PHDL in England and Wales, participants were not followed-up so it was not possible to verify if their hope of a better future had been justified.

In Ireland, there has been further research which investigated PHDL, with some post-release interviews and links to transformative learning theory. Costelloe (2003) conducted a study of higher (third) level students in prison in Ireland. Like Hughes (2007), she focused on motives for learning. After a pilot study, she sent a questionnaire to all Open University students in Irish prisons and interviewed 38 of the 56 respondents. Her findings suggested that initial motivations for studying PHDL were extrinsic, or a “push” away from prison life and to alleviate boredom. However, she found that motives became more intrinsic as “their study became increasingly fulfilling and self-satisfying” (Costelloe, 2003, p149) and students were “pull[ed]” with thoughts of life after prison such as future employment or improved quality of life. She suggested that this change of motive was evidence of transformative learning but there was no follow-up and she was unable to identify how this affected their life post-release. Methodological limitations were that she treated the prisoners as a homogeneous group for selection but found that the high proportion of sex offenders who had untypical prisoner characteristics skewed her results. This suggested an important argument for focusing the participant selection criteria to counteract potential bias as regards drawing conclusions about the larger target population.

Cleere (2013) aimed to extend Costelloe’s (2003) research by investigating the motivations for studying across all levels of prison education in Ireland. In a mixed-methods study of 42 prisoners across 2 prisons in Ireland, she focused on links between prison education, social capital and desistance. She found that participating in

prison education increased confidence, self-esteem, self-control, agency and the formation of pro-social bonds (see also Maruna, 2001). She also found evidence of higher social capital among those who were participating in education and suggested that learners were “‘insulated’ by the positive and constructive mindset created through education. This prevents them from accumulating the [negative] prison currency and mindset.” (p261). She posited, therefore, that education reduced barriers to reintegration and thereby influenced desistance (see 2.7.2). Her measurement of social capital used a definition laid down by Forrest and Kearns (2001) and a survey using a bank of questions from the Office of National Statistics. Her finding that social capital and prison education had a strong positive correlation was interesting, although she did not establish levels of social capital on entering prison and, with only 47 participants her quantitative study was rather small. Also, in broadening her research to all levels of education her results did not sufficiently identify participants’ levels of learning so the role of higher-level distance learning was unclear. She did collect data from five ex-prisoners in order to extend her findings to the post-release environment and found that prison education had helped them to take control over their lives as well as enabling them to change their circle of friends. However, she did not complete a longitudinal study by following her main group of participants after release and her findings provided very little detail of the release process or how that related to learning.

Although emphasising the barriers to PHDL in prisons, this literature has clearly identified the potential for PHDL to be transformative. There is, however, a lack of understanding about how the PHDL is transformative and there is also very little understanding of how any changes which are brought about by the learning affect the students’ aspirations for their future on release. These studies lacked information on how perceptions changed over time or how transformational changes played a role in prisoners’ lives after release either from a personal or a social perspective. All researchers acknowledged the lack of follow-up post-release as a limitation and

suggested this as an important component of any future research. Further research is therefore required which investigates how PHDL might be transformative for prisoners in England and Wales and how it affects the learners' lives after release.

There are therefore two sets of questions which emerge from this literature:

1. In what ways is PHDL transformative?

- In what ways can it lead to personal change in the learner?
- How does that change relate to hopes and aspirations for future prospects and life chances?

2. What role does PHDL play in the learners' life after prison?

In order to identify more clearly how the second question should be phrased, further details are required about the post-release environment.

## **2.7: Transformative learning and the post-release environment**

With a lack of empirical research of post-release effects of PHDL, this section reviews two other sets of literature: the studies which evaluate prison rehabilitative interventions and longitudinal desistance studies which investigate factors that may help or hinder criminals (often ex-prisoners) in changing their views of the world.

### **2.7.1 Evaluation of rehabilitative programmes**

This section briefly reviews some studies which have investigated the effectiveness of prison education. Most recidivism or employment evaluations focus on non-education interventions (as discussed in 1.3.4) but there are some studies which are specifically aimed at education and others which have a small section on education. However, these are rarely UK-based and most effective evaluations on any interventions are from North America (Harper and Chitty, 2005).

Randomly controlled experimental research is considered by some researchers to be the most methodologically rigorous approach to identify causal relationships between

prison education and reduced reoffending but has numerous practical difficulties and is relatively rare in the UK prison context (Farrington and Jolliffe, 2002; Farrington and Welsh, 2006; Harper and Chitty, 2005). Quasi-experimental approaches (in which a treatment and comparison group are not randomly assigned) are more prevalent on both sides of the Atlantic to evaluate whether education in prison has any effect on recidivism. In a recent meta-analysis of studies in the US, Davis et al. (2013) found a reduction in recidivism through education programmes in prison and these were found to be most effective when the programme connected inmates with the community outside the prison. There were, however, insufficient studies related to higher-level education which could be used for a meta-analysis and the authors suggested that more information was needed on how programmes actually affect inmates' cognitive development. Many of the quantitative studies suffered from problems such as poor initial assessment or inappropriate participants or failed to take account of the many other factors which may affect post-release lives. The authors called for more research which "get[s] inside the black box to identify the characteristics of effective programs" (Davis et al., 2013, p65). More detailed identification of characteristics could come from in-depth qualitative research.

A follow-up study of the Simon Fraser programme (see 2.6.1) identified several groups of prisoners, on specific characteristics, who had taken the program and compared their actual recidivism to their prediction based on risk. This type of realistic evaluation (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) enabled them to glimpse into the black box and identify in what circumstances the education was effective in reducing recidivism. They found that the degree of effectiveness of the program varied widely and was not, by any means, transformative for all participants but the percentage who reoffended in each group was either equal to or less than the predicted reoffending rate. In the case of those who were repeat offenders and had fully engaged with the course, there was a significant reduction in recidivism rates (Duguid and Pawson, 1998).



Although reoffending rates are very important, they are not the focus of this thesis. What helps or hinders the prisoner's learning journey towards recidivism is what is relevant here. Duguid and Pawson (1998) suggested that by enrolling on the course the prisoners had made a choice, by engaging with the course and by not giving up they had made another choice. These were the first two decisions which set them apart from the other prisoners and onto a path of further choices before and after release. Thus, Duguid and Pawson (1998) proposed that "it is not the programs that work but their capacity to offer resources that allow participants the choices of making them work" (p492). However, their program was classroom-based higher education so their findings did not provide any evidence as to whether distance learners could gain similar benefits from their learning and although these evaluative methods provided a little detail, they did not identify how individual participants perceived their learning to be transformative or made a difference to their life after release.

Evaluations of the effectiveness of interventions for employment have also had problems identifying the detailed criteria for success. Hurry et al. (2006) drew together empirical evidence about the effectiveness of interventions which focused on employment for offenders. They reviewed 53 studies which had been completed in prison or the community and found evidence that interventions did make a difference to the employment rates of offenders. They highlighted the difficulties for prisoners reintegrating into the community and the importance of consistent and tailored support for ex-prisoners. Some of the key recommendations included connecting interventions before and after release, requesting employers to interview before conducting criminal records checks, enabling ex-prisoners to have more access to information and ensuring education services were based on an assessment of individual needs. However, they were unable to come to any conclusions about effectiveness of education as there were not enough programmes or enough detail about what education actually meant. They suggested that as many of the interventions were multi-

modal, then “[u]npicking the positive features of an intervention package may be better achieved using qualitative methods” (Hurry et al., 2006, p64).

Qualitative evaluation methods are now more frequently being used to provide detailed information about how ex-prisoners might stop re-offending. Most of the research which developed the theory of desistance is longitudinal (both qualitative and quantitative). It is also strengths-based (see Burnett and Maruna, 2006; McNeill and Weaver, 2010) which considers the prisoner or ex-prisoner as a whole person with an identity, as opposed to risk-based cognitive or behaviour interventions which tend to treat participants as a number.

### **2.7.2 Desistance theory and empirical research**

As discussed in 1.4.2, early theories of desistance focused on the ageing process but research showed a more complex process. Sampson and Laub (1993) offered a life-course perspective of desistance based on their longitudinal research on white, male delinquents over the life-span. Defining desistance as the underlying causal process leading to termination of criminal activity, they suggested that a variety of complex developmental, psychological and sociological processes lead to desistance which was not just ageing but related to maturing. They saw bonds between the individual and society as crucial to the individual achieving their crime-free goals. Sampson and Laub (1993) suggested that membership of social institutions such as marriage, employment or parenthood might help to develop those bonds. A learning community might also help to develop such a bond.

Maruna’s (2001) phenomenological desistance study in Liverpool aimed to link desistance with self-identity. He interviewed 55 men and 10 women ex-prisoners (30 self-reported desisting from crime, 20 were still criminals and 15 were out of scope). The interview data was supplemented by 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork, with a variety of rehabilitation and resettlement programs. In his analysis (see p173) he

measured agency and generativity through a content analysis (see Erikson, 1968 ; McAdams and de St. Aubin, 1992 and Appendix A). He found that “to desist from crime, ex-offenders needed to develop a coherent, prosocial identity for themselves” (p7). Those who were desisting from crime had high self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) and a desire to give back to society. These qualities were lacking in those still committing crime. There was no detail of learning in his findings and further research should investigate if these qualities are also related to transformative learning.

Giordano et al. (2002), as a counterpoint to Sampson and Laub (1993), conducted a mixed methods study of mixed-race delinquent adolescent men and women in the US. They suggested that desistance process was related to cognitive and identity transformation which involved an initial “openness to change” and then a series of cognitive shifts which they termed “hooks for change” (Giordano et al., 2002, p1000). These were, they suggested, catalysts to influence an identity change and gradual decrease in the desirability of criminal behaviour. Although the women participants’ adult lives differed from their male counterparts, their desistance processes and “hooks for change” were found to be remarkably similar. Again, no details of learning were provided but further research should investigate how this “openness to change” and the “hooks for change” relate to transformative learning.

In a qualitative longitudinal study of 199 men and women on probation in England after release from prison (Farrall, 2002; Farrall and Calverley, 2006), desistance was found to be intrinsically linked to the agency of the offenders who were trying to change their lifestyle. In that study, all participants were interviewed at the beginning of their probation, 137 interviewed after 6-7 months, then 51 were followed-up after 3-4 years. Accommodation, employment and family relations were all found to be affecting the offender’s opportunities to succeed in desisting but probation officers were found to be of little help to the offenders. Although education was perceived to be a positive

activity, Farrall and Calverley (2006) were unaware of participants' previous educational history or how their learning related to agency and ability to deal with the structures in their post-release social setting.

Findings from a longitudinal study of 130 persistent offenders over two years after their release suggested that their level of optimism might have an impact on their successful desistance (Burnett, 1992). In a re-analysis ten years later Burnett and Maruna (2004) redefined the participants' optimism as "hope", which they then defined as "an individual's overall perception that personal goals can be achieved" (p 395). They suggested it was more than just wishing that something would happen, rather it required both the "will and the ways" (p 395) which means the desire for a particular outcome as well as the perceived ability and means of achieving it (see Snyder et al., 1991). They found that participants with high hope were better able to deal with social problems and so seemed better able to cope with life after prison, even after 10 years. However, they also found that when the social problems became too extreme, then their hope was unable to cope with the reality of their situation. They argued therefore that, "self-confidence in one's ability to change seems to be a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for an individual to be able to desist from crime" (Burnett and Maruna, 2004, p399). They did not consider the effects of learning in their studies so were unaware of whether learning would affect the levels of hope or whether transformative learning might affect hope's longevity in the face of increased social problems.

More recently, Aresti et al. (2010) identified pro-social identity and employment as two key features in the desistance process. This small study is included because all of their 5 participants, or successful desisters, had completed higher education while in prison or shortly after leaving prison, however the learning was not identified as a key element in the transition.

These empirical longitudinal studies have interesting findings which highlight the many qualities which may enable ex-prisoners to be better able to face the structural barriers on release. However, none of these longitudinal studies considered the effects of the ex-prisoner's learning either before, during or after prison, or considers continued study as an option to employment post-release. Even Aresti et al. (2010) failed to identify the importance of the learning in his findings. Hughes (2012) and Cleere (2013) have both suggested links between learning in prison and desistance from crime but as neither completed a longitudinal study, it was unclear how any personal and social changes through learning actually related to life after prison.

Finally, a developing strand of the desistance literature is seeking to identify the stages of the desistance process. The first stage of desistance is considered to relate to behavioural change and Giordano et al. (2002) suggest this is 'openness to change', while Bottoms et al. (2004) suggest a trigger event. Farrall and Maruna (2004) propose that positive social identity may make the difference between a primary desistance (a crime-free gap) and secondary desistance (where the desisters no longer see themselves as offenders). Secondary desistance may involve a fundamental change of identity (see also Farrall et al., 2010; McNeill and Weaver, 2010). However, more recently McNeill (2014) has suggested a tertiary desistance which is related to belonging to a community. These levels of desistance may be related to developmental learning theories and thus transformative learning.

This empirical and theoretical desistance literature does not help to answer the research questions being asked in this thesis but it does provide a good indication of the qualities required for desistance and integration into society on release from prison which are remarkably similar to outcomes from transformative learning theory. In particular, hope and aspirations, personal and pro-social identity may all be potentially

important in the post-release environment and may change over time. It therefore provided information for the second research question.

Considering these studies, the second research question becomes:

2. What role does PHDL play in the learner's life after prison?

- How does it equip learners with the personal and social qualities required to manage life after prison?
- How does it relate to their integration into society?

## **2.8 Chapter conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed theoretical and empirical research which investigates the power of learning. It began by examining adult learning theories and introduced transformative learning as a useful conceptual framework for understanding how adults learn. Transformative learning is considered to be a developmental process but there has been much debate about how that transformation occurs. Transformative learning was then used as a lens to review epistemological developmental learning theories, and the research on which they were based. It was identified that there was a need for more research which investigated cognitive development and transformative learning.

A review of the literature which defines identity suggested that although the prison was an environment in which identity could be lost, there was a lack of research which investigated how transformative learning may affect identity in that context. Acknowledging the importance of the context in which people learn, especially if learning in a pervasive prison environment, social and situated learning theory was reviewed. This highlighted the need for more research which investigates higher-level transformative learning in a prison context. The limited empirical research which has investigated prison-based higher-level learning was then reviewed. Classroom-based

studies have indicated that transformative learning could be fostered in a prison through a positive collaborative learning environment but it was unclear if this could also occur for distance learners.

The very limited literature which has investigated PHDL was then reviewed. This literature clearly highlighted the barriers to PHDL in prison but also the potential for PHDL to be transformative. It also showed that there was a lack of information on how the PHDL might be transformative, how it changed prisoners and how it affected their hopes and aspirations for their future on release. Almost all previous PHDL studies have lacked a longitudinal element so there is very little understanding about what role higher level learning plays in prisoners' lives after release.

By further investigating post release studies which have not focused on learning, it was identified that a qualitative, longitudinal study could provide information on how perceptions change over time. Such a study could potentially identify what role prison-based transformative learning plays in the lives of its learners after release either from a personal or a social perspective. This leads to the following research questions, which are explored in this thesis:

In what ways is PHDL transformative?

- In what way can it lead to personal change in the learner?
- How does that change relate to hopes and aspirations for future prospects and life chances?

What role does PHDL play in the learner's life after prison?

- How does it equip learners with personal and social qualities required to manage life after prison?
- How does it relate to their integration into society?





## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have suggested that Prison-based Higher-level Distance Learning (PHDL) may provide prisoners with the qualities to support and facilitate desistance from crime and hence help them to lead better lives after release. However, there is a lack of research which investigates in what way the learning is transformative, whether it actually makes a difference to prisoner's lives after prison and how it helps them to integrate into society. Two main research questions have been identified which are repeated here:-

1. In what ways is PHDL transformative?

- In what ways can it lead to personal change?
- How does that change relate to hopes and aspirations for future prospects and life chances?
- 

2. What role does PHDL play in the learner's life after prison?

- How does it equip learners with the personal and social qualities required to manage life after release?
- How does it relate to integration into society?

This chapter provides a rationale for the qualitative, ethnographic and longitudinal research approach adopted in order to answer these research questions (section 3.2). It explains the phased approach to the research (section 3.3), the proposed selection of the participants and research sites (section 3.4 and table 3.1) and a rationale for the chosen methods for collecting the data (section 3.5 and table 3.2). A rationale for the

data analysis method is also provided in 3.6. Risks and ethical issues are discussed in 3.7 and the chapter concludes in 3.8.

## **3.2 Research approach**

Human beings are social actors who interpret their social world and, given the opportunity, have a story to tell about how they perceive it to be. The research presented in this thesis is an exploratory investigation (Mason, 2002), using the research questions above, into how higher-level distance learners interpret the learning process within the specific social and cultural context of prison. Acknowledging that the learners' accounts are their own individual perceptions, the research aimed to identify the ways in which their learning related to personal change and life after release from prison. Arguments that language is constructed, that nothing beyond the discourse is valid (Potter and Wetherell, 2001), are countered by a "subtle realism" (Hammersley, 1992, p50-54). This subtle realism argues that perceptions may differ, but an assumption can still be made that the described phenomena are as they are and not just how they are perceived to be, as long as threats to validity are minimised through reflexivity (Hammersley and Gomm, 2006). The concept of reflexivity acknowledges that the researcher sees and interprets the researched world through their own socio-historical background, the researchers' involvement influences, acts upon and informs the research and the production of knowledge from the research has consequences for the researched world. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Nightingale and Cromby, 1999).

Considering the requirements of the research presented in this thesis, there were several advantages to favouring a qualitative over a quantitative research approach. Firstly, qualitative research methods focus on interpretation and aim to provide accounts of participants' views, values and actions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). These are required to investigate the learning journey through the prison gate. The flexible

nature of qualitative data collection methods was considered to be ideal for use across multiple contexts including the closed prison environment as well as the variety of post-release environments. In contrast, quantitative research methods may de-contextualise the learning from the broader social, cultural, economic and political forces (Hodkinson and James, 2003). Surveys have been used with both closed and open questions in a prison context as part of mixed-methods approaches (Hughes, 2007) but delivery, completion and return have been found to be difficult and highly dependent on the prison authorities. Surveys were therefore not considered to be a viable option as a major source of data collection in the present research.

Secondly, although quantitative studies may be able to identify 'what works' in rehabilitating offenders (see 2.7.1 above), they would not be able to identify why or how they work. Most importantly, quantitative methods could not produce in-depth accounts of learning journeys, which were required to understand the prisoners' own perceptions of hopes, aspirations and personal change through contextualised learning. Hence, quantitative methods were not considered appropriate for answering the research questions.

Thirdly, as qualitative methods are in-depth studies, they generally require smaller numbers of participants than quantitative methods. There were expected to be at least 20-30 participants with the required criteria for the research, which was adequate variation for qualitative research (Miles and Huberman, 1994) but there were not expected to be sufficient numbers with the required criteria to attempt a quantitative study. Hence a qualitative approach, which also acknowledged the complexity of the prison and post-release context, appeared to fit the research requirements very well and was considered the most appropriate approach to provide meaningful answers to the research questions.

### **3.2.1 Qualitative research approaches**

Having determined that a qualitative approach was most suitable for the research it was then necessary to determine which specific qualitative research methods most effectively answered the research questions. Several options were considered and the rationale for choosing an ethnographic and longitudinal approach is provided below.

A case study design was considered but that required an in-depth study of only one case or a small number of cases which would not be a large enough starting sample of participants for the post-release follow-up as a high drop-out rate was expected. In order to have sufficient numbers of participants to gain an understanding of how PHDL affected post-release lives, larger numbers of in-prison participants were required. Phenomenology is an approach which focuses on lived experiences, providing a description of how a specific phenomenon is experienced (Denscombe, 2003). This approach has been successfully used to identify ways in which higher-level distance learners conceptualise reflection on their learning (Alden, 2013). It was also used to investigate experiences of self-change by ex-prisoners by Aresti et al. (2010). A description of the learners' lived experiences and their conceptions of learning were of some interest, but they would not fully answer the research questions. It was not their learning experiences which were of most interest but how they were able to arrange those experiences in relation to external structural factors and how the results of those experiences shaped their hopes and aspiration for future life chances upon release. Hence, a phenomenological approach was not considered appropriate.

#### ***Ethnography***

An ethnographic approach, which involved drawing on a range of data sources to “throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p3), was considered well-suited to research in a prison environment for a number of reasons. Firstly, ethnography's multiple and flexible qualitative methods

could generate rich descriptions of the learning journey, giving voice to the participants and gaining an in-depth view of learning in prison. Secondly, although ethnographic data collection was time consuming, it could provide multiple perspectives to give an understanding of learning culture within the complex cultural layers of prison. Time is the currency of prison life (Sparks et al., 1996), and giving time to the collection of research data enables the researcher to scratch below the surface of the prison culture (Crewe, 2006). Hence, an ethnographic approach was most appropriate for a prison environment.

Conducting ethnography in a prison environment is considered to be intricate and challenging (Jewkes, 2002; Piacentini, 2007). Gaining access for full immersion within the prison field is difficult. Piacentini (2007) learnt another language, risked isolation and poor physical health to totally immerse herself in the field so that the culture in the Russian prison and the research methods became inseparable. Some researchers, for example Crewe (2006) and Liebling (2013) have gained access to prisons for prolonged periods with relatively unrestricted movement within the prison, but this is rare in the UK and often associated with Government-backed research.

Some researchers argue that research in prison cannot claim to be ethnographic if the researcher is not fully immersed in the field (Earle and Phillips, 2012). Liebling (2001) suggested that to fully understand the “subjective meanings and emotions” in a prison then the researcher needs to be “affectively present as well as physically present” (p474). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), however, argue that even with limited access a selective approach could still result in good quality ethnographic data through strategic sampling complemented with productive recording and reflection of routine activity as well as extraordinary activity. Hence, the ethnographic approach with careful strategic selection in time and place, was considered appropriate for collection of data to answer the first research question in the prison environment.

Other researchers claim that conventional ethnography is not sufficiently political to give enough voice to its participants and that a more critical ethnography is required which not only describes the culture but also tries to change it for political motives (Thomas, 1993). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue that the primary goal for all research should be knowledge and that political goals would “increase the chances of the findings being distorted by ideas about how the world ought to be” (p17). Whilst acknowledging this debate, the purpose of the present research was not political, and conventional ethnographic, qualitative methods were considered suitable for the complexity of the prison environment (Mason, 2002). Nevertheless, methods of doing research cannot be completely neutral as they are designed, collected and analysed by the researcher who has epistemological, ontological and theoretical assumptions. Reflexivity was therefore needed, as in all research, and “[d]ata should not be taken at face value, but treated as a field of inferences in which hypothetical patterns can be identified and their validity tested” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p17).

### ***Longitudinal approach***

In order to capture the temporal nature of transformative learning and build on historical features which identified perceived changes over time, the research required a longitudinal element. There were two specific types of temporal sampling in this research. The first was the temporal sampling within the prison environment. The ethnographic approach described above was already inherently temporal (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Holland et al., 2007) as it involved time in the field and with strategically selected temporal sampling, was considered adequate. However, temporal sampling in the post-release environment was a separate issue. It could also be problematic but the problems were related to locating and re-locating the released prisoner participants. The environment in which ex-prisoners live and work may be inhospitable or even hazardous (Maruna, 2001). Again, multiple and flexible methods of data collection were required to allow the researcher to use every opportunity to gain

an in-depth view of change through learning over time, from multiple perspectives. However, the post-release environment with individual participants spread over a wide geographical area, intermittently accessed over a long period of time, was not conducive to ethnographic fieldwork. Hence, a qualitative prospective longitudinal research approach (Holland et al., 2007) was considered to be more appropriate for collecting data from participants in the post-release phase.

Qualitative, longitudinal approaches have been used successfully for life-course desistance studies (Farrall, 2002; Farrall and Calverley, 2006) and higher-level study drop-out (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2001). Qualitative, longitudinal research approaches usually involve repeated in-depth interview-based data collection and have their strengths and limitations. One of the perceived limitations is that data collection is very time-consuming and resource-intensive (Farrall, 2006). There is currently no guidance in the literature of how long studies should last or the length of time between interviews so these decisions must be made within the research design. For example 30 participants interviewed every 3 months for 1 year would generate 120 interviews to transcribe and analyse. Also, since the same topics were discussed repeatedly, the possibility of question fatigue was considered, with the potential for “socially desirable (and seemingly plausible) answers which may not fully reflect what the respondent truly feels” (Farrall, 2006, p6).

There are also ethical issues with qualitative longitudinal approaches such as the tension between minimising attrition and encouraging participation or dealing with data from participants who later drop out (Corden and Millar, 2007). These were not necessarily new ethical issues to those found in other qualitative methods or longitudinal methods but rather they were heightened (Farrall, 2006, see also 3.7). However, the strength of qualitative longitudinal research is the potential for its informants to reflect on changes over time (especially subtle emotions such as hope for

instance). Also, responses from previous interview transcripts could be validated and inform future interview questions. So, the research approach for this research was qualitative, ethnographic and longitudinal.

### **3.3 Rationale for a phased research approach**

The research design was aimed at the most effective way to generate data which answered the research questions and it was important to review both prison and post-release contexts separately and in-depth. The complex permissions and multi-site, ethnographic and longitudinal approach requirements suggested that a phased approach to the research could be useful. By separating the research into three phases for different contexts, the data collection methods could be specifically considered for their effectiveness in each context. However it should also be noted that 'context' was not the same as 'place' since architectural structures are only the scenery for the performance (Goffman, 1969) so the prison context spanned over several prisons and the post-release environment was anywhere the released participant attempted to get their life back on track. Each phase also required slightly different permission and ethical considerations. The rationale for this is as follows:

**A pilot phase** aimed to provide an understanding of prison learning and the resettlement process early in the research process. A historical perspective was obtained by collecting in-depth accounts from ex-prisoners who completed higher-level distance learning prior to release from prison. The data helped to answer the first research question but also, as the ex-prisoners had been released for some time they were less likely to still be on temporary license and so accessing them did not require National Offender Management Service (NOMS) approval. Also, as the ex-prisoners had started to turn their lives around, they had a view on what had helped them. In particular, they had a perception of what role their learning had played which helped to answer the second research question. The ex-prisoners also identified some of the



issues they faced on release and hence helped to guide the main data collection phases. The aim was for some participants who were also 'in-prison' participants from previous research who had since been released to provide a temporal element to the research at an early stage and to guide further data collection. As this was a retrospective study, respondents may not have recalled events in the correct order or may have added rationality to their actions which did not exist at the time (Farrall, 2006). Although this pilot phase did not require NOMS' permission and did not have the constraints of the prison context, full ethical approval from the University's Human Research Ethics Committee, was required, sought and obtained (see 3.7).

***An in-prison phase*** aimed to gain in-depth accounts from serving prisoners who had completed or were completing PHDL in order to understand how PHDL leads to personal change and affects hopes and aspirations for life after release. This phase therefore required significant presence in the prison for building rapport and observing the learning process within the prison's multi-layered culture. An additional perspective on the barriers to study and a comparative element was gained from a selection of participants who had not engaged with the learning. Observation and informal conversations with others provided multiple perspectives for increased validity. Thus, this in-prison phase took a qualitative, ethnographic approach. Eligibility for the next phase was that the participants were due for release within the data collection period of the research and so could be followed up post-release. Information was required from participants relating to post-release destinations. Access to prisons required a lengthy permissions process from NOMS and individual prison management. The analysis was ongoing and findings fed forward to the longitudinal phase. Ethical approval was required and there were additional ethical concerns regarding prison research (see 3.7).

***A post-release phase*** aimed to capture the changing perspectives of the role of learning in post-release life chances by obtaining in-depth accounts from participants

from the in-prison phase at least once after release and subsequently for as long as possible. This was therefore a qualitative, prospective, longitudinal approach. Since these participants were released on temporary license, access was via their offender manager in the relevant Probation Trust. Identification of those Probation Trusts was not possible until shortly before, and sometimes after, the participant was actually released. NOMS permission and ethical approval for this phase was conducted separately from the in-prison phase as the Probation Trust information was required for the permission process. In this way, the in-prison phase could begin as early as possible without the need for post-release data. Also, this post-release phase began as soon as possible after one of the prisoner participants was released and then ran in parallel with the in-prison phase. The analysis was ongoing and findings fed back to the in-prison data collection. Ethical issues in this phase were particularly related to safety of the researcher as well as secure storage and appropriate use of longitudinal data (see 3.7).

### **3.4 The Sample: Site and participant selection**

The participant sample for this research consisted primarily of adult (men and women) prisoners and ex-prisoners who had completed or were currently studying PHDL and were able to give detailed accounts of personal change through transformative learning and how this might affect subsequent life chances. Participants with very specific criteria were required to provide the necessary perspectives to answer the research questions. Therefore, a probabilistic approach was not considered necessary and a purposive sampling approach was used to hand pick both the sites and the participants (Blaxter et al., 2006).

A comparative element was introduced by sampling over the multiple prison sites and by including some participants who had attempted but had not engaged with the learning. The main student participants, providing the personal perspective, were

denoted as student-prisoners or primary participants. However, additional social perspectives from other participants were required to help to answer the questions fully, provide a balanced view and add meaning to the student-prisoners' accounts. These additional perspectives were gained from: educational stakeholders; non-participant prisoners; education, prison and probation staff; friends and relatives. They helped to verify the personal perspectives and more fully investigate the transformative learning phenomena so answering the research questions. See table 3.1 for a summary of the site and the participant selection which are discussed below.

### **3.4.1 Site selection**

#### ***The in-prison phase***

This phase required data collection from students and other participants in adult prisons. Young Offender Institutes were not included in the prison sample because, in 2009, less than three per cent of Open University prison students were in Young Offender Institutes. However, that percentage may change with the Open University's move towards recruiting younger students. Representative sampling of student participants included men and women so male and female prisons were included in an appropriate ratio. The actual number of adult prisons selected depended on the number of student-prisoners meeting the required criteria in each, and also on permission criteria. Although multiple prisons provided a means of comparison, the complex permissions and disparate access procedures were difficult and time-consuming so, to reduce the number of prisons required, adult prisons with the most PHDL students were sought. Fortunately, those prisons with larger numbers of PHDL students tended to also meet the 'good practice in terms of support for PHDL' criterion (see below).

Previous research (Pike, 2010b; Pike and Adams, 2012) highlighted that a 'progressive' or 'learning' prison (see 2.6.3 and 4.2.2) may have the best support for

learning and it could therefore be assumed that interviewing students who had studied in such prisons may give the best chance of identifying transformative PHDL. The criteria for a 'progressive' or 'learning' prison, and therefore what was considered 'good practice' in terms of delivering and supporting PHDL, was sought from a variety of different stakeholders using a variety of different data collection methods as follows (see also 4.2.2 and Appendix E3):

- Facilities and support for PHDL: The literature review, prisoner/ex-prisoner perspective from pilot and previous data; practitioner perspective from informal discussions with PHDL provider staff and third sector organisations, Ofsted reports.
- Number and quality of PHDL applications for funding: Analysis of Prisoners Education Trust data.
- Number of students and pass rates: Analysis of three distance learning providers; Open University, National Extension College, Open College of the Arts.
- Use of technology: Ofsted reports, discussions with Virtual Campus manager and Open University staff

These criteria enabled a short-list of 20 prisons for the NOMS permissions process (see Appendix E4) but the deciding factor would be the number of potential participants, with the right criteria, in each prison.

### ***The post-release phase***

Data collection sites varied in this phase. As highlighted in the literature, most ex-prisoners who were on sentences of more than one year were released on license so their whereabouts were known by the Offender Manager at the relevant Probation Trust but this information was confidential and their actual destination was often unknown (even to the participant) until the actual date of release. Depending on specific demands from the NOMS permissions criteria, data collection was planned to take place in pre-arranged 'safe' settings (see ethics, section 3.7) such as an Open

University centre or a public library. The participant's workplace was also considered suitable but required permission from all concerned and raised additional ethical considerations.

Table 3.1 Selection criteria for site and participant samples

Phase	Population	Selection Criteria	No. of participants/ prisons required
1. Pilot	Adult ex-prisoners (men and women)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Completed PHDL before release and not on temporary license</li><li>Have begun to resettle/integrate into society</li><li>Accessible</li></ul>	8-10 participants  (including 2-3 from previous research if possible)
2a. In-prison (Prisons)	Prisons: Adult prisons in England and Wales (state and private) (95 male, 11 female)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Holds at least 4 prisoners with right criteria (see 2b below)</li><li>Has some form of 'good practice' in PHDL (see 3.4.1 and Appendix E3)</li><li>Accessible</li></ul>	6-10 prisons (At least 1 female) Short-list of 20 sought
2b. In-prison (Participants)	Student participants: Adult prisoners who have completed PHDL or (for comparison) have considered but not engaged with PHDL.  Other participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Sentenced adult prisoner in a prison fulfilling selection criteria of 2a (above)</li><li>Not lifer or sex-offender</li><li>Due for release within 6 months</li><li>Accessible</li></ul>	40-50 participants (5-10% women)
3. Post-release	Other participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Multiple relevant others who have another perspective</li></ul>	Dependent on data collection requirements
	Student participants: Released phase 2 participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Accessible</li></ul>	As many as possible
	Other participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Multiple relevant others who have another perspective</li></ul>	Dependent on data collection requirements

### **3.4.2 Pilot phase participant selection**

Five to ten ex-prisoners were considered appropriate as participants for the pilot phase. They were required to have had experience of PHDL and been released for some time so were not on license, and did not require NOMS approval, yet had experience of resettlement. They were self-report “desisters”, if such a thing exists (see Maruna, 2001, p43) and had begun to turn their lives around after release. As discussed above, it was hoped to include previous research participants who had since been released to provide an early longitudinal element to the research. Findings from this pilot phase guided the later, more complex, research phases both practically and with regard to focus of the research questions.

### **3.4.3 In-prison participant selection**

The student participants in the second phase of the research were adult (men and women) sentenced prisoners who had successfully completed (or contemplated for the comparison group) one or more PHDL courses. Actual numbers of distance learning students in prison were unavailable but the Open University was by far the largest provider with approximately 1500 (in 2009), of whom 8% were women. The Prisoners Education Trust was also the prime funder for PHDL so their records also provided information on the potential research population in each prison. Where a choice of participants existed, those who had taken more courses were preferred, to improve chances of transformational change through learning. They also needed to be due for release within approximately 6 months from the in-prison interview to allow post-release follow-up within the timescale of the research.

A preferred, but not essential, attribute for student participants was to be a multiple offender who had been to prison several times previously or been in the criminal justice system since their youth. The role of transformative learning was potentially more identifiable for such multiple offenders as desistance, and integration into society, was

expected to be a more difficult process (Farrall et al., 2010). Socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and low entry qualifications were also preferred participant attributes to improve the possibility of identifying effects of prison-based learning and to aid comparison with similarly disadvantaged students elsewhere. Sentence lengths of participants were expected to be more than 12 months since distance learning is not an option for short-term prisoners (Ministry of Justice, 2010b). However, 'lifers' (including indeterminate sentence prisoners) and sex-offenders were specifically excluded as resettlement for these prisoners is very specific and could be liable to confuse findings (Costelloe, 2003; Jewkes, 2002; Mills and Grimshaw, 2012).

Although it was acknowledged that insufficient data was available for representative sampling of all the higher-level distance learning prisoners, the selection attempted to include men and women in a similar ratio to the population. Thus the sample required the inclusion of five to ten per cent women which could allow some comparison of gender although this was not the aim of the research. The inclusion of women was expected to broaden the scope of the research and potentially allow some gender comparison but also introduced some potential complications as the employment and resettlement issues for men and women prisoners differ (Home Office, 2007).

Other participants would be anyone else in or out of the prison that had a relevant perspective which could add meaning to the primary participant perspective and would include prison security and resettlement staff, prison education and advice and guidance staff, distance learning provider staff, other prisoners and participants' families.

#### **3.4.4 Post-release participant selection**

Student participants for the longitudinal post-release phase would be those participants from the in-prison phase (above), who had release dates within the data collection period and were willing to be re-interviewed after release. No sampling was necessary



as the participation rate for this phase was expected to be quite low and all willing participants from the in-prison phase would be accepted.

Other participants were those people who could provide additional perspectives to the role of PHDL in life after prison and to give meaning to student participant accounts, such as probation staff, educational stakeholders, employers, friends, relatives, colleagues. Sampling of these was more opportunistic though also 'theoretical' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p177), as the data would be partially analysed and emerging themes could affect further selection.

### **3.5 Methods of data collection**

Having determined that a qualitative, ethnographic and longitudinal approach was most suitable for the research, this section provides the rationale for which data collection methods most efficiently answered the research questions. The qualitative data collection methods considered here include those most commonly associated with the adopted approach, that is participant observation, interviews or other oral accounts and the use of documents and other artefacts (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). There were three specific contexts for data collection: they were the pilot, retrospective data collection from ex-prisoners who were not on license; the in-prison context, which involved data collection within the complex prison environment; and the post-release context, which involved the prospective longitudinal data collection with released prisoners over time. The different data collection options were considered for their effectiveness to answer the research questions within these contexts.

#### **3.5.1 Pilot data collection**

Ex-prisoner participants who had been released for some time were expected to provide historical accounts of their learning journey. They were expected to have a perspective on how their learning in prison had affected them, whether it changed their

hopes and aspirations and how it related to coping with life after release. They were chosen because they had begun to turn their lives around. They could describe how they had managed to overcome the post-release issues and whether they had continued or returned to their learning or gained suitable employment. They also had a perception of how others perceived them and supported them. They therefore were able to provide historical information on changes in identity, social and economic integration.

However, these historical accounts may have changed with time and were therefore treated with caution as the participants were looking back on their prison learning and their earlier release with potentially a different perspective to that which they had at the time. These pilot participants were expected to not be on license so there was no restriction on access and they mostly had employment, transport and finances. They were not known personally to the researcher so to develop a rapport a face to face interview was preferable. However, as they were interviewed for their historical perspective, a one-off interview sufficed, in an Open University centre or a library and a telephone interview provided an acceptable alternative (see section 3.5.4 below).

### **3.5.2 In-prison context**

The in-prison context for data collection was denoted as the environment in which the prisoner learnt, which included the cell, the library, the association rooms and the education department. Unsolicited or 'naturally occurring' oral accounts were both a rich source of direct information about the learning process, but also provided perspectives on psycho-social dynamics and the prison learning culture. Such accounts were gained through participant observation. Participant observation can take on many meanings, for example some researchers use it as an umbrella term to denote all the data collected in the field, whereas others use the term to denote anything other than interview data (Wolcott, 2008).

There has been much debate as to how far researchers can participate in the situations they study or whether it is ever possible merely to observe (Burgess, 1984; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The term 'participant observation' in this thesis denotes everything the researcher saw and heard in the field which had not been specifically solicited, although it was acknowledged that some, if not all, of those being observed would be aware of the researcher and affect what happened (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). (This is not to suggest that observation did not occur during interviews, it did, and the field-notes and analysis included these observations, but this distinction has been drawn for organisational purposes.)

Some places, for example the cell, were not suitable for participant observation due to access and safety reasons. However, other places such as independent learning sessions on the Virtual Campus or other technology rooms in the education department were ideal for observation of learning in context. The library and staff rooms in the education department were also particularly suitable for data collection through participant observation, where actions and discussions indicated the learning culture within the overall prison culture and the potential for transformative learning. Observation of facilitation and support for learning over different prisons provided an additional perspective and validated participants' oral accounts. Also, some informal conversations arose out of the observation process.

There were some areas within the prison, notably those areas where the student-prisoner studied at length, such as on the wing, in-cell, or even in other prisons which were not observable. Given the opportunity, in the in-depth interview, participants often provided rich oral descriptions of learning in those places and potentially historical accounts of learning elsewhere. However, they also had perceptions of current PHDL processes and what had helped or hindered progress. As they were approaching release, they had hopes and aspirations for their future after prison and a view about

whether PHDL had affected these. They also had perceptions on how those aspirations were supported by the prison. Those who had not engaged successfully with their learning provided a different perspective and identified additional barriers to learning. Interviews were mostly conducted in suitably private places which were free from supervision, yet as 'natural' as possible to provide a relaxed atmosphere (see interview design in 3.5.4 below).

Peer discussions were a useful means of identifying how learning was supported. Focus groups can provide an opportunity for peer discussions (Adams and Cox, 2008) but previous research experiences of group interviews in prison (Pike, 2010b) had highlighted several confidentiality issues. Also, focus groups could not have replaced the individual in-depth interviews which provided personal perspectives of prison-based learning. Nevertheless, some useful peer discussions were observed during technology sessions and informal and opportunistic conversations with other prisoners provided an additional perspective.

There were many 'other' participants who were targeted for their knowledge and their willingness to divulge it (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). For example, prison education staff provided additional information on levels of engagement and assessment issues as well as a perspective on participants' learning journeys. Administrative staff and managers provided a perspective on how the learning was managed and what was considered positive or negative with regard to maximizing the potential for transformative learning in prison. They also provided an overview of the resettlement process within different prisons, how the participants were prepared for release and how their current and future learning, hopes and aspirations were related to that process. As the different phases of the research were running in parallel, it was also possible to theoretically sample some participants to test out specific emerging themes such as resettlement issues identified by released participants.

Although much of this additional data was collected face to face during prison visits, there were opportunities for other discussions with distance learning tutors and others who were not present in the prison during the visits. These required telephone or email conversations. All this background information added meaning and validation to the student participant in-depth interview accounts.

### **3.5.3 Post-release context**

The post-release context for data collection was determined as any everyday environment in which the participant interacted with the outside world and was able to freely discuss their perception of their world after prison. The participants had a perception of whether the skills and qualities they currently possessed had changed through PHDL and how those skills and qualities related to managing their life after release from prison. Subsequent interviews provided details of how the participants coped with life as well as their perception of how they were managing. Like the ex-prisoners in the pilot, these participants had a perspective on other people's attitude towards them such as family, friends, other students, employers and the community at large, thus providing current data on potential changes in identity, social and economic integration and well-being as well as potential for desistance.

Most participants in this longitudinal phase were released on license and access permissions were obtained from NOMS and Probation Trusts as appropriate. The need for transparency and adherence to strict National Offender Management Service guidelines restricted access in some cases (see 4.3.3). Hence, in order to maximise the potential for data collection after release, multiple opportunistic, formal and informal, data collection methods were required (see interview design below). Mutually acceptable, 'natural' and 'safe' settings for interview such as Open University centres or public libraries were considered, although finding a private space for an interview in a public library would have proved difficult. Probation centres were not considered

sufficiently 'natural' as it was unlikely the participant could talk freely (see interview design in 3.5.4). The participant's workplace was considered suitable and introduced the potential for observation and employer interviews. However, this required permission from all concerned and additional ethical considerations.

Informal and opportunistic conversations with others in the post-release context provided additional perspectives. Again, these other participants such as family, friends, probation officers and tutors were targeted for their knowledge of the situation and their willingness to discuss it. In some cases they validated student participants' accounts and provided information on the whereabouts and situations of those participants who were not accessible.

#### **3.5.4 Interview design**

As highlighted above, participants in each context generated specific information which helped to answer the research questions. The interview was the ideal data collection method to access privileged information from these student-prisoners who were in a special position to know something which is not known by most members of society (Denscombe, 2003). They generated rich accounts both for information about how the participants self-reported personal change through PHDL and for analysis of their historical perspectives (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

Kvale (2006) Interviewing has been described as "a conversation with purpose" (p 483) but he warned that referring to the interview as a dialogue was misleading as it did not acknowledge the power asymmetry of interview. It served only the purposes of the interviewer who sets the agenda, deciding where it occurs, how long it lasts and how it ends. Briggs (2002) suggested that the power of the interviewer lay not only in their control over what happens in the interview but also that they use what happens and present it in a report of some kind. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) acknowledge that the researcher may play a more dominant role in an interview, and this heightens the

danger of reactivity, but this cannot be avoided and can even be used for benefit. For example, by seeing the interview as a social situation, albeit an artificial one, in which the researcher observes how the participant reacts in that particular situation. Nevertheless, to improve validity and to encourage participants to be as relaxed as possible, the interviews were informal and in-depth, not following a strict sequence but allowed to flow as naturally as possible. This suggests an unstructured interview in which the role of the researcher is unobtrusive (Denscombe, 2003). The main aim of the research is, however, to answer the research questions and unstructured interviews would not necessarily allow the focus of the interview to remain around the research questions, so a semi-structured interview design was most appropriate.

Face-to-face interviews were preferable as they can provide an opportunity for building rapport, encouraging participants to be more at ease with the interview situation and even eliciting more information. However, a marginal position was maintained for objectivity, acknowledging the dangers of “over-rapport” and the consequent potential for a biased perspective (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p87-88). Where face-to-face interviews were not possible, telephone interviews provide an alternative. Telephone interviews have been found to compare well with face to face interviews for data quality and depth and can provide added anonymity for reluctant participants (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004), although they may lead to reduced ability to build rapport with the participant (Shuy, 2003). However, being able to ensure privacy for the participant during an arranged telephone call in a prison was considered to be unlikely so telephone interviews were not considered as the first choice in the prison context and certainly not for the first interview when building rapport was most important.

Telephone interviews were considered a good alternative to face to face interviews in the post-release context as they allowed more flexibility in time and place. The reduced

ability to develop rapport was not such a problem as all the longitudinal interviewees had been interviewed previously so a rapport had already been developed. However, the lack of visual stimuli was considered during analysis of the data (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004). Also, "access to a research setting is never a given" (Lee, 1995, p 16) and telephone interviews alleviated safety concerns of potentially dangerous settings, enabling interviews with some participants who would otherwise have been unavailable. However, a telephone interview required the participant to have access to a telephone which they could use privately, and was potentially a problem.

Regardless of whether the mode of interview was face-to-face or telephone, this section has argued for informal, in-depth, semi-structured interviews in a suitable 'private' place which is free from supervision, yet as 'natural' and 'safe' as possible. These provided the deep and rich accounts required to answer the research questions. The interviews then needed to be recorded for later analysis. Recording through a small audio-recorder was the preferred option but where an audio-recording device was not allowed in the prisons, handwritten notes were taken. It was acknowledged that not everything could be recorded and "field-notes are always selective" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p 142) but both previous research studies in prison had similar problems and a type of coding system had been devised to speed up writing. Acknowledging the importance of the participants' actual words, these were always recorded as closely as possible but many quotes were specifically and carefully recorded exactly as heard.

Where an audio-recording device was used in face-to-face interviews, it was used "as a *supplement* to observation and fieldnotes, rather than as a *replacement* for these" (Hammersley, 2003, p 341, emphasis in original). Audio-recording only ever took place after full consent from the interviewee. That was particularly important, ethically, for telephone engagement where the participant was unable to see the recording device.



A prompt sheet was used to guide the interview (see Appendix C). Acknowledging that any questions by the researcher affected the participants' responses, the prompt sheets were only used where necessary, that is where the conversation was going completely off course. However, the interview prompts for post-release interviews were tailor-made to follow-up on previous interview data, asking specific questions which built on previous perceptions (Farrall, 2006). All interviews, after introductions, aimed to allow four specific phases to the interview (see Adams and Cox, 2008): background, letting-off steam, addressing issues and debrief. Analysis of the interview data considered the questions asked as well as the responses, acknowledging that the exact words could not always be recorded in the hand-written field-notes.

### **3.5.5 Longitudinal design**

Human social interactions change over time so temporal sampling was necessary. There were several temporal levels in this research. The first temporal level was the student's perceptions of change through PHDL as their experiences of learning changed so some temporal sampling while participants were in prison was required. Access to prisons was limited but strategically planned visit times maximised the time available with participants, especially for example ensuring that visits covered any independent learning sessions and potential use of Virtual Campus. So in-depth, semi-structured interviews (see 3.5.4) with carefully designed questions to encourage retrospective data, specifically regarding prior learning experiences, were combined with observation and informal conversations at other times of the day. By maximising the time available in the prison, there was more opportunity for observation of routine activity as well as extraordinary activity (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In addition, learning provider records showed policy changes and some repeat visits to prisons were planned, especially where release dates of participants were several months in the future. This also ensured that most participants were interviewed shortly before release which improved the data regarding resettlement.

The second temporal level was the longitudinal aspect of the research which aimed to capture the role of PHDL in life after prison and how perceptions changed over time. For the pilot study, this was achieved in two ways. Firstly by reanalysing previously collected data and potentially re-interviewing previous research participants, thus expanding on previous research. It was understood, however, that previous research questions, whilst open ended, were broader than the current research and this was taken into consideration during the analysis. The second method for the pilot study was in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the selected ex-prisoners and, as stated above, these retrospective accounts were treated with caution.

The in-prison participants had thoughts about their future after release. They also had perceptions about future or past experiences of previous releases so had a view on whether their learning might affect their prospects for employment or social integration upon release. Post-release participants had mostly recent experiences of the transition from prison to community and interviewing them as soon as possible after release provided the best opportunity of capturing these perceptions. Regular re-interviewing (every two to three months) was planned, to identify perceived changes in identity, short and long-term goals and hopes and aspirations. Actual times for re-interview were dependent on access.

Acknowledging that change often takes time to emerge (Farrall, 2006), the follow-up continued for as long as possible. Multiple opportunistic and informal data collection methods were required in order to maximise the data after release. These included face-to-face, telephone informal interviews, or informal conversations. Other forms of engagement were text, letter, email and social media. Informal conversations with other participants aimed to validate the accounts from student participants, providing another perspective on how the participants were coping with life, how they were supported or not, and how this related to changes through learning.

### **3.5.6 Additional data**

In order to gain information about the PHDL process across the prison estate, additional data collection methods were considered. Document analysis was also useful supplementary method of data collection (Wach et al., 2013) as it could be completed without a site visit. Document analysis was clearly not suitable as the main data collection technique as it could not have provided perceptions of learning. However pertinent procedural, policy, inspection and statistical documents did sometimes provide relevant information which brought meaning to the oral accounts and observations.

### **3.5.7 Summary of data collection methods**

This section has discussed the qualitative, ethnographic and longitudinal data collection methods planned for this research and highlighted why they were chosen to most effectively answer the research questions (see table 3.2 for a summary). The data collection methods for the participants in the complex prison environment were in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with additional data generated from participant observation where possible, informal conversations with non-participating students and other stakeholders where applicable. This provided direct situational information and ideas to bring meaning to the data collected through the interviews. Post-release data collection was more flexible using a variety of data collection methods including face-to-face and telephone in-depth, semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, text, email, letter and social media with released prisoners primarily but also many other secondary sources to gain additional perspectives.

Table 3.2 Summary of plan for data collection methods

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	DATA SOURCE: DATA COLLECTION PLANNED
<b>1. How is PHDL transformative?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In what ways can it lead to personal change?</li><li>• How does that change relate to hopes and aspirations for future prospects and life chances?</li></ul>	<b>Students (pilot):</b> Face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews <b>Students (in-prison):</b> Face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, informal conversations and participant observation. <b>Others (in-prison):</b> Staff (Prison education managers, coordinators, teachers; advice and guidance; resettlement, PHDL provider tutors), relatives: Informal and opportunistic conversation (face-to-face, telephone and email), observation of learning with technology and other facilities, analysis of procedure/policy documents and inspection reports.
<b>2. What role does PHDL play in the learners' life after prison?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How does it equip learners with the personal and social qualities required to manage life after release?</li><li>• How does it relate to integration into society?</li></ul>	<b>Students (pilot):</b> Face-to-face or telephone, in-depth, semi-structured interviews <b>Students (longitudinal):</b> A series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, starting in prison (as per 1a above) and at intervals post-release through any means available – face-to-face, telephone, text, email, social media <b>Others (post-release):</b> Family, friends, probation officers, tutors etc.: informal interviews and opportunistic conversation (face-to-face, telephone and email)

### 3.6 Analysis and representation of data

The phased approach to the research outlined in 3.3 above, allowed the analysis to be on-going from the first data collection of the pilot so there was no specific analysis phase. Various qualitative analysis approaches were originally considered, in order to determine patterns across the data to answer the research questions. Some methods were discounted immediately on epistemological grounds such as Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis which is related to a phenomenological epistemology and is about understanding the detail in participants' everyday experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The method which is commonly connected to analysing ethnographic data is grounded theory which was initially promoted by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and was developed more formulaically by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

The first steps of grounded theorising, open coding, are very similar to other types of analysis, in particular, thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) which, like grounded theory, is grounded in the data. However, unlike grounded theory, thematic analysis does not force the levels of abstraction of the data but does allow integration of the themes. Thematic analysis does not claim to specifically work towards a theory, unlike grounded theory, although that is not excluded (Clarke and Braun, 2013). However, a theory was in fact ultimately developed in this thesis. Thematic analysis *did* offer an accessible and flexible approach for complex qualitative data from multiple prison and post-release environments and was considered to be the most appropriate method for the analysis of the data collected. However, that flexibility meant that, to avoid criticism of "anything goes" (Antaki et al., 2002), clear and explicit information about the method was required (see below) and confirmation that the actual analysis matched the method (see 4.4).

Thematic analysis involves immersion in the data by repeatedly listening to audio recordings, reading and re-reading transcripts and noting initial observations (Braun

and Clarke, 2006). Although transcription is time-consuming, the time can be used to become familiar with the data and to pre-code by jotting down interesting ideas which appear. All the transcribed data and much of the audio data were loaded into NVivo and stored within its phase (pilot, in-prison or post-release). Coding is then an analytical process by which labels are given to important and relevant features and these are then collated into groups. The grouped data is then searched and relevant themes constructed which show patterns in the data. As with all other stages of the research process, reflexivity is required to ensure that the researcher's role in the process is adequately acknowledged. Eventually, when a particular data section was relatively complete, visual representations are used to present thematic maps of the data and to identify relationships between the themes (see 4.4 for more details)

This thematic analysis approach improves validity, allowing multiple sources with different perspectives and providing a better understanding of the complexities of the different collection techniques. Analysis is a continuous process. The themes build up and are reviewed over the period of data collection and beyond (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Emerging themes are checked for relevance with newly collected data and new themes emerge. When to stop analysing is a difficult decision as "longitudinal data are intimidating in that there is no closure and the next round of data can challenge interpretations" (Thomson and Holland, 2003, p237).

### **3.7 Risks, challenges and ethical considerations**

There were many risks and challenges associated with the research in this thesis and they were separated into two different types of risk: procedural and personal.

#### **3.7.1 Procedural risk and ethics**

The main procedural risk associated with the present research was related to access. The key access issue was the permission required to research within the criminal

justice system. Initially, permission from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) Research Committee was required. The Research Committee had very clear guidelines on what type of research could or could not be undertaken in its prisons and Probation Trusts. One important criterion was that the research was useful to NOMS and aimed to reduce the amount of work for its staff. The proposal therefore promised a 'good practice' guide for higher-level learning in its prisons and to work with the prison staff to reduce their inconvenience during the research process.

Permission from the governor of each prison was also required and finally, permission from each Probation Trust to which the ex-prisoner participants were assigned. The phased research plan described above allowed for more flexibility for alternative approaches should permission be refused or delayed at any stage. In particular, the pilot phase did not require NOMS approval so could be ongoing throughout the permissions process. Approval for each phase was sought separately from the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendices D) and the NOMS Research Committee (see Appendix E). Permission to research in specific prisons or Probation Trusts followed once NOMS approval for each phase was gained. Data collection was guided by the data protection act and the NOMS permissions criteria.

The other key procedural risk was related to accessing the participants once permission had been granted. Initially identifying which prisoners were due for release was difficult. Accessing newly released prisoners in the longitudinal phase was also a problem and required the support of several organisations. The drop-out rate was expected to be high and [the size of the?]initial interview population took that into consideration. Power relations are a concern for researchers in any research context but in a prison environment "power and control ebb and flow in complex ways that are sometimes visible, but mostly hidden" (Piacentini, 2013, p21). Hence the research design considered the power relations at every stage. For example, as stated in 3.5.4,

by ensuring participants could not be overheard by prison or probation staff but also just being aware of potential issues at all times.

### **3.7.2 Personal risk and ethics**

The second type of risk for the research was personal risk which included risks of harm (physical and psychological) to the researcher and the participants. They included the many ethical issues about researching prisoners or ex-prisoners who could be continuing a criminal career or could be living in dangerous circumstances.

The research adhered to British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines as well as Open University ethical guidelines and approval from the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee was sought at an early stage (see Appendix D). However, research involving vulnerable people has many specific ethical challenges (Roberts and Indermaur, 2003; Ward and Henderson, 2010) and a number of specific issues required consideration at different stages of the research. These are discussed below under the five main principles which were considered to underpin the main ethical concerns: harm (or beneficence), informed consent, respect (or privacy), reciprocity and justice (or equity) (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Hammersley and Traianou, 2012).

#### ***Harm or beneficence***

For the participant: Participants, prisons or employers were anonymised to prevent harm from any adverse publicity or publications at a later date. Finding a pre-arranged 'safe' setting to conduct the interview required sensitivity to the needs of the participant, especially with regard to other prisoners, ex-prisoners and staff. Post-release, sensitivity was needed to the ex-prisoners' need to keep their prison history private so meetings in the home or the work environment were hazardous. Neutral environments such as an Open University regional centre or other similar setting were considered best for face-to-face meetings. Other contact also needed careful consideration. For



example letters and emails were carefully worded to ensure that the minimum information was provided in case they were read by others. Mobile phone messages and texts were only used when it was certain that the participant was the recipient. In all contact with the participants, and especially in interviews, every attempt was made to avoid sensitive or distressing subjects.

For the researcher: Enhanced Criminal Record Bureau disclosure was obtained to be shown when questioned. As an ex-prison staff member, the researcher was fully conversant with prison security procedures and had been trained (albeit several years ago) in self-defence. However, the post-release setting was particularly problematic as the ex-prisoner's environment was unknown consequently the neutral environment (as above), telephone and email contact were considered the most suitable and safest options.

### ***Informed consent***

Participation was completely voluntary and participants were required to sign consent forms (see Appendix B). Roberts and Indermaur (2003) argue that signed consent forms may pose a threat to confidentiality or a prisoner's future wellbeing if they did not fully understand the implications or divulged anything illegal. To ensure that participants understood the implications of the research and its subsequent report, easy-to-read information sheets accompanied the consent forms. Also, the research focused on education and not their crimes so the likelihood of them discussing illegality was reduced, but the requirement to inform the authorities of any illegal acts was added to the information sheet.

For in-prison, probation or hostel interviews, the rights of prisoners to make free and informed decisions may not always be appreciated by gatekeepers who consider their institution management as the only authority deciding prisoner participation (Waldram, 1998). Information and consent forms were provided through contacts in the education

department where possible or directly to the participant. The main points were also discussed at length prior to interview. The option to withdraw at any stage up to analysis and the opportunity of not being recorded was also stressed, with time given for reflection before the end of the interview.

Longitudinal research does not necessarily add to these concerns but rather accentuates them, since the researcher returned to the same participant and topics time and again. Those participants, who were involved in the longitudinal phase of this research had signed consent forms to be re-interviewed on release. However, before further participation post-release they were asked again and informed that regardless of what they had signed they were free to withdraw at any time. They were reminded regularly about what the research was about and that it would ultimately be used for a report.

### ***Respect and privacy***

Finding a pre-arranged private setting within a prison for a face-to-face interview was problematic. The researcher was guided by the prison staff but requested a private place and was sensitive to the needs of the participant. Anonymity and confidentiality were stressed before and after the interview (especially relative to staff/ student relationships). The research focused on education and not their crimes so future reporting was less of a problem but reports were fully anonymised, not only with names of participants but with any other name, such as prison, which could identify the participant.

All data was anonymised and subject to the requirements of the Data Protection Act. The required Open University Data Protection form was completed and all necessary measures to ensure the security of the data were taken. Audio files and/or transcripts and other electronic data were stored in password-protected files on a laptop, printed

material in locked cupboards and personal data kept separately from the interview schedules to protect confidentiality and preserve anonymity.

### ***Reciprocity***

For in-prison interviews, access to prisons was difficult and people who were inconvenienced or disrupted by the research could have required recompense, in order to allow access to more research in the future. The researcher attempted to fit in with the prison regime and be guided to the participants and spaces available. For both in-prison and post-release data collection, the researcher was aware that participants may request favours but were informed of the researcher's role, working within the BERA ethics code and had no influence in relation to their studies, nor could there be any other privileges. However, travel expenses were paid for travel to interview sites.

### ***Equity and justice***

An attempt was made to treat all participants equally within the research process and not discriminate against or exploit anyone. (See researcher involvement in 4.5)

## **3.8 Chapter conclusions**

This chapter has discussed the methods employed in the research. It began with the rationale for why the research took a qualitative, rather than a quantitative, approach. It then presented the research as qualitative, ethnographic and longitudinal and detailed reasons for the multiple-phased approach. The site and participant selection process was discussed in section 3.4, summarised in Table 3.1, and the preferred final selection was planned as follows:

- A short-list of 20 prisons with the required criteria for the NOMS permission process. The actual number of prisons was then determined by the number of participants with the required criteria in each prison.

- Pilot participants: Four or five known ex-prisoners who have been released for some time for their experience of resettlement, and another four or five participants from previous studies to provide a longitudinal aspect early in the research.
- In-prison participants: Approximately 40-50 sentenced adult prisoners (including 5-10% women), across the selected prisons, who were not sex-offenders or 'lifers', were studying (or considering studying for comparison group) PHDL and due for release within six months.
- Post-release participants: No new student participants required for this phase as it involved following as many of the in-prison participants as possible after their release.

Data collection in the pilot phase was planned to be retrospective, one-off, face-to-face or telephone interviews in varied settings. Data collection in the prison environment was planned to be through a variety of qualitative, ethnographic techniques including face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, informal discussions and analysis of other artefacts. Data collection in the post-release longitudinal phase was planned to be through face-to-face or telephone in-depth, semi-structured interviews but other forms of communication were considered feasible. Thematic analysis (see section 3.6) was chosen for its flexibility across multiple settings. The risks and the ethics in the research have been discussed in section 3.7 with potential methods of solution proposed.

The next chapter provides details of how the planned research was amended during the research process in order to collect and analyse the data in the most effective way to answer the research questions. Therefore, most of the topics in this chapter are returned to in more detail in chapter 4.

## **Chapter 4: Data collection and analysis**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter discussed the methodology and indicated that the most appropriate approach for this research was qualitative, ethnographic and longitudinal with a thematic analysis. A 3-phased research plan was proposed, for the selection and collection of data to best answer the research questions:-

1. In what ways is PHDL transformative?

- In what ways can it lead to personal change in the learner?
- How does that change relate to hopes and aspirations for future prospects and life chances?

2. What role does PHDL play in the learner's life after prison?

- How does it equip learners with personal and social qualities required to manage life after prison?
- How does it relate to their integration into society?

This chapter discusses how the research plan was adjusted as the research progressed and how the data was actually collected and analysed. Section 4.2 explains the practicalities of the complex access and permissions process, which includes the final selection for participants and data collection sites. Section 4.3 explains the challenges of the data collection process and how those challenges were met. Table 4.3 summarises what data was collected from whom and how it relates to the research questions. The thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which was ongoing throughout the whole research process, is discussed in section 4.4. Section 4.5 then describes some of the problems encountered and how additional ethical issues were tackled. Section 4.6 provides the chapter summary.

## **4.2 Access: Permission and selection**

Gaining access to the prisoner, and some ex-prisoner, participants required a complex and time-consuming permissions process and there were numerous other practical challenges which changed the planned selection for the prisons, participants and post-release data collection sites. Table 4.1 (the updated version of Table 3.1) shows the final number of prisons and the number of participants who actually took part in the research. The following sections explain how they were selected and accessed.

### **4.2.1 Pilot phase selection and access**

The 10 student participants in the first phase of the research were adult ex-prisoners, including one woman, who had completed PHDL and had been released for some time so had experience of the resettlement process (see Appendix F1 for characteristics). They were either known to the researcher directly through research networks and conferences or were recommended by colleagues. Purposive sampling (Blaxter et al., 2006) was used to handpick participants with the selected criteria (see Table 4.1) from those available. Notable differences to the planned selection were:

- There was only one participant from previous research. Originally it was planned to make up half the participants by re-interviewing willing released prisoners from previous in-prison research (Pike, 2010a, 2010b). To this end, previous research contact data was checked for currency and carefully worded letters, emails and texts were distributed to addresses, e-mails and mobile numbers but response was poor and ultimately only one previous research participant was included.

Table 4.1 Final numbers of prisons and participants

Phase	Population	Selection Criteria	Actual selection of participants and prisons
Pilot	Adult ex-prisoners (men and women)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completed PHDL before release, not on license</li> <li>Have resettled</li> <li>Accessible</li> </ul>	<b>10 participants</b> (9 men, 1 woman)  Included 1 man from previous research
In-prison	Adult Prisons in England and Wales (95 male + 11 female)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Holds at least 4 prisoners with right criteria</li> <li>Some form of 'good practice' in PHDL</li> <li>Accessible</li> </ul>	<b>10 prisons</b> (including 2 female prisons and 2 additional open prisons after transfers)
	Student participants: Prisoners completing PHDL or DNE <sup>1</sup> with PHDL.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adult prisoner in a selected prison</li> <li>Not lifer or sex-offender</li> <li>Due for release</li> <li>Accessible</li> </ul>	<b>51 student participants</b> (10 DNE <sup>1</sup> , 40 men, 11 women)
	Any relevant others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have another perspective</li> <li>Willing to share knowledge</li> </ul>	42 other participants (25 prison education staff, 6 prison staff, 3 prison managers, 6 DL provider staff)
Post-release	Student participants: In-prison participants (above)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accessible</li> </ul>	<b>38/51 participants in scope</b> (7 DNE <sup>1</sup> ) 28/38 traced (4 DNE <sup>1</sup> , 23 men, 5 women) 25/38 had at least one interview (2 DNE <sup>1</sup> , 20 men, 5 women)
	Any relevant others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have another perspective</li> <li>Willing to share knowledge</li> </ul>	25 other participants (5 relatives, 6 probation staff, 8 DL provider staff, 4 prison staff (recall + mentor), 1 employer, 1 University dean)

Note 1: DNE = Did Not Engage with study (for comparison)

- The participants were older than anticipated with no participants below 30, 50 per cent of the participants in their 40s, and several over 60 (see Appendix F1)
- One 'lifer' was included. Life sentences were excluded from the main selection criteria because of resettlement issues but as the participant had been released for more than 2 years and had begun to integrate into society, he was included.

Initial contact was made either through a third party or directly with the participants, depending on whether they were known to the researcher. Although face-to-face interviews were the preferred plan, ultimately only two interviews were face-to-face as although they were keen to participate, they were mostly busy getting on with their lives and did not have a lot of time to spare. The majority were telephone interviews which were easy to arrange and enabled participants to remain in the comfort of their own home. To ensure participants were fully informed, they were all supplied with information sheets and consent forms in good time (see Appendix B). All consent forms were signed before the interview although these were sometimes electronic signatures on email.

#### **4.2.2 Prison selection and access**

Prison selection for the in-prison phase was complex and time-consuming. As discussed in 2.6.3, previous research had shown that prisons varied substantially in how they supported PHDL. Describing prisons with respect to their learning support, along a spectrum from 'learning' to 'working' had previously proved useful. Those prisons which placed a high value on learning tended to support PHDL better than those prisons which placed a higher value on other forms of activity. Of course, these values are multi-dimensional, the management of prison activities and the value placed on individual needs of prisoners are highly complex. Even focussing purely on learning, there was wide variety in perceptions of what 'good' support might look like. Identifying



which prisons had 'good practice' with regard to PHDL was therefore particularly difficult.

As discussed in 3.4.1, there were numerous methods of collecting data on the specific 'good practice' criteria, in order to get a clearer picture of what 'successful' PHDL might look like, what was considered as 'good' PHDL support, and hence a closer idea of the concept of a 'learning' prison. A variety of different methods were used as follows:

- ***Facilities and support for PHDL:*** The pilot study (above) provided an ex-prisoner perspective of the concept of a 'learning' prison. The ex-prisoner participants stressed the need for good access to technology, pro-active prison education staff that coordinated well with the distance learning providers and provided open learning sessions which allowed communication with other students. The practitioner perspective was gained by seeking advice from distance learning provider staff. It included informal discussions with Open University regional staff and email correspondence with managers at the National Extension College and the Open College of the Arts. Their image of a 'learning' prison was similar to the ex-prisoner's view but more geared towards smooth running of the distance learning process. Again there was a desire for pro-active, in-prison, coordinators who provided adequate accessible resources but also good administrative staff who organised assessments and tutor visits efficiently. Discussions with third sector organisation staff provided another perspective. They were concerned about good prison education management. One trust director provided an example of two prisons she had visited within the same region. She gave an interesting comparison of two prison education departments with very different outcomes for distance learning. Both education managers cared about distance learning but had interpreted the new Prison Service Instruction (Ministry of Justice, 2010b) differently. One worked with the prison management and had innovative methods to help facilitate distance learning but the other had suspended all distance learning

on the grounds that it was undeliverable with current funding and staffing issues. These views were compared with any recent Ofsted reports and prisons were classed as good, average or poor. The data was complex and comparison was difficult (see column 2 of Appendix E3). Once again (see 2.6.3) it must be stressed that these crude descriptors were related only to perceived good practice in facilities and support for PHDL, they did not suggest in any way that the whole prison was good or bad. More recent reports give other examples of good practice of support for learning (Prison Reform Trust and Prisoners Education Trust, 2013; Prisoner Learning Alliance, 2013)

- ***Number and quality of PHDL applications for funding:*** This was gained through two visits to the Prisoners Education Trust for data analysis and informal staff discussions. See PET data columns in Appendix E3. Total applications per year were weighed against prison population and number of students who were thought to be due for release. The emphasis was not just on numbers of prisoners' applications for funding but also on the calibre of those applications. This highlighted again the differences in management of learning or advice and guidance for learning.
- ***Number of students and pass rates:*** This was gained by analysing student numbers for three distance learning providers (Open University, National Extension College and Open College of the Arts) in all prisons in England and Wales. Total numbers of current students for the other providers were small and no pass rates were obtainable (see column 'Other providers' in Appendix E3). For the Open University, the following data was analysed (see columns 'OU data' in Appendix E3):
  - Numbers of students on two data snapshots (April and July 2011)
  - Pass rates on courses commencing February 2010

- Pass rates on higher-level courses.

Once again, data was complex. Pass rates of 70 per cent and above were classed as good, in terms of pass rates in prison generally, although total numbers were also taken into consideration. For example, a prison which had achieved a high pass rate for very few students may not necessarily be better than a prison which had achieved a slightly lower pass rate for a large number of students. Some pass rates were surprisingly low. Numbers of students were relevant, for finding sufficient participants, but not necessarily an indication of good practice as it depended on the size and type of prison.

- ***Use of technology:*** This was gained by interviewing the Ministry of Justice Virtual Campus manager and by communication with the Open University's Offender Learning team to assess those prisons which were proactively engaging with the Open University's Virtual Campus trials. It also involved informal telephone communication with a number of prison education staff to identify how well the Virtual Campus was being used and by analysing the numbers of students who had used online access for their courses in 2009-2010 (see Appendix F3).

Unsurprisingly (Pike, 2010b; Pike and Adams, 2012), many of the prisons which contained the most 'good practice' in terms of PHDL and were in the 'learning' end of the spectrum, were not in scope of the present research as they were high-security prisons or therapeutic prisons with longer term prisoners not due for release. Consequently, it was necessary to select those prisons with the most 'good practice' for PHDL while still satisfying the other key criteria.

Ease of access, in terms of known gatekeepers and geographical location in which students were to be released, was also very important. The final selection of 20 prisons with the best chance of successful completion of the research was a purposive sample according to the following selection criteria:-

- Sufficient number of PHDL students fulfilling the participant criteria
- Ease of access, including known gatekeepers and distance from the researcher's home.
- Provision of some aspect(s) of 'good practice'.

The NOMS permission process for the in-prison phase took approximately 6 months and required several amendments (see Appendix E1). Once permission had been granted it was necessary to contact the short-listed prisons, both at a senior management level to request permission, and at an operational level, establishing how many PHDL students were potentially available for interview. The final number of prisons chosen was dependent on the number of students due for release in each prison (see below).

#### **4.2.3 In-prison, participant selection and access**

The student participants in this phase of the research were adult prisoners who had successfully completed one or more PHDL courses and were due for release within the period of data collection of the research (see table 4.1 above). Accessing prisoner personal and sentencing information, to determine who was due for release, required delicate negotiation and permission procedures. The information was obtained from a multitude of places including Prisoners Education Trust, NOMS, Distance Learning provider records and staff in the selected prison. Initially, the Prisoners Education Trust records were analysed for potential release dates of funded prisoners in selected prisons, however these were only prisoners who they had funded and current whereabouts were not always known. Those prisoners with potentially relevant release dates were then checked against current students in distance learning provider records to ascertain current whereabouts. A potential list of participants was then sent to NOMS to be matched against earliest release dates (see Appendix E5 for a small

sample). Then finally the individual prisons were contacted, first for permission and then for information on current PHDL students.

Finding a comparison group of participants who had failed to engage with PHDL proved to be extremely difficult. Prisoners who had not engaged with learning did not appear on the prison's learner lists and were therefore difficult to trace. The Prisoners Education Trust (PET) provided a list of potential non-engaged participants who had been refused funding (mostly because demand was higher than funds). Distance learning provider records were also analysed for those prisoners who had failed to engage with their courses. However, most prisons did not acknowledge requests to interview these students.

As the research progressed, it became clear that some participants, who were originally chosen because they had supposedly engaged with one PHDL course, had not fully engaged with the course so they were moved into the 'Did Not Engage' (DNE) group. Ultimately, the number of DNE comparison participants was 10 (approximately 20%), which enabled some comparison. It consisted of prisoners who had been refused funding, had failed to start a course or had started a course but failed to complete.

In addition to the selection criteria in table 4.1 (above) there were some preferred attributes where a choice of participants was possible, which included socio-economic and multiple offender attributes (see 3.4.3 for discussion). Final lists of potential participants were sent to the selected prisons with information sheets and permission slips. Some prisons failed to respond at this point but eight prisons contained supportive contacts who agreed to distribute the information sheets and organised dates for visits. Visits were arranged to coincide with any distance learning or technology sessions which would allow more opportunity for observation. Despite the long preparation to ensure a suitable selection of prisoners in each prison, the final list

of participants for interview on the day was not always that which had been planned. The reasons for this were numerous and are discussed in 4.3.2. Lists for interview were sometimes filled with other students who did not always meet the required criteria.

The final selection was 51 student participants across 10 prisons (see table 4.2). There were 40 (78%) men across eight male prisons and 11 (22%) women across two female prisons. An extra two open prisons were added to the original selection as some prisoners, who had later release dates, were transferred to open prisons and were re-interviewed prior to their release. Some prisons were visited more than once to re-interview participants with later release dates or to investigate particularly good practice.

Of the 51 student participants, 10 (20%) did not engage (DNE) with their studies (nine men and one woman). These formed the comparison group. The percentage sample of women was larger than the percentage of women in the prison population (5%) or the percentage of women studying Open University in prison (8%) but NOMS had requested a larger sample for comparison. The total population of PHDL students is unknown but the self-reported age distribution of the male participant sample compared favourably with the male prison population. (See Appendix F2, figure F2.1). The sample of women was still too small for a comparison with the prison population to be sensible.

**Table 4.2: Data collection across prisons**

Prison code	Prison Type	Visits	First student participant interviews	Second student interviews	Others (staff, peers)	Total no. of interviews
D	F closed	1	3		5	8
F	M cat C	1	5		2	7
H	M cat C	2	9	1	4	14
M	M cat C	2	9	1	3	13
P	M Private	3	8	1	10	19
R	M Private	1	2		2	4
S	M cat C	1	7		3	10
V	F closed	1	8		4	12
H <sub>2</sub>	M cat D	1		1	1	2
L	M cat D	1		3	2	5
<b>Totals</b>			<b>51</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>94</b>

Note on prison type: F = female, M = male, cat = category (see 1.3.1))

#### **4.2.4 Post-release participant selection and access**

Of the 51 prisoners initially interviewed in prison, only 38 had release dates which were compatible with the research data collection period. The characteristics of those 38 participants are provided in Appendix F3. Pseudonyms have been chosen which reflect gender and ethnicity. Gender differences were not the focus of the research but some were surprising. For example, all the women who participated had no self-reported previous prison sentence history and the 7 female participants in the longitudinal phase had sentence lengths between 18 months and 12 years (mean 6.7 years). Many of the men were multiple offenders with up to 10 previous custodial sentences (mean 2.3) with sentence lengths of between 2 years and 20 years (mean 6.1 years). A graph showing the previous qualifications of the group is also provided in Appendix F3 (figure F3.1). As a criterion for participation in the research was a low prior qualification, the 37% having less than standard GCSE qualifications and only 5% of participants having

higher education qualifications prior to entering prison for the first time, showed a good match.

The participants had already given their permission for post-release contact and had provided forwarding addresses of parents, partners or personal email addresses wherever possible. As explained in previous chapters, most were 'on license' and so their whereabouts were known to an offender manager in the Probation Trust to which the participant was released. Their permission was required after the NOMS permission had been granted. Once participants were released it was necessary to find out to which Probation Trust they were being sent and to identify their offender manager. That information was often surprisingly difficult to obtain. It was sometimes considered confidential and the destination was often unknown (even to the participant) until the actual date of release. Someone in the prison knew where the prisoner had gone, but it was not always easy to find that 'someone'.

Each offender manager had their own concept of 'confidential information' and there was sometimes much written communication, including confirmation of the NOMS permission material. Eventually, a discussion with the offender manager took place about the risks and license criteria, in order to assess the best follow-up procedure. Many participants were low risk and there were no license conditions to prevent the research going ahead and it was possible to contact the participant directly. Sometimes the offender manager preferred to control contact and confirm whether the student was still happy to participate. Occasionally the offender manager provided assistance, especially where the participant was in a hostel or was not immediately traceable through the contact details they had provided during their in-prison interview.



### **4.3 Data collection**

This section provides details of the process and practicalities of data collection over all phases of the research; that is the pilot, the in-prison ethnographic data collection and the longitudinal data collection post-release phases. It also explains the opportunities and the problems which led to the research plans being altered in order to most effectively answer the research questions. Table 4.3 provides a summary of the complex data collection process and is an updated version of the plan for data collection in Table 3.2.

#### **4.3.1 Pilot data collection**

The 10 student participants in the pilot phase were all ex-prisoners who had been released from prison for between 6 months and 10 years. As the length of time since release suggests, they had varying degrees of stability in their lives although most had employment or were in higher education and considered themselves to be integrating into society (see Appendix F1). All participants were contacted in advance either by telephone, email or face-to-face. Field-notes were made during or shortly after the discussions. The participants were usually exceptionally happy to participate as they felt strongly that they needed to give something back and help those who were still in prison. It was usually possible to discuss with the participant whether they preferred a face-to-face or telephone interview. Most participants chose to have telephone interviews which occurred in their homes in the evening. However, one participant was in a hostel and the telephone interview took place at a pre-arranged time. He appeared content that our conversation was private but that could not be confirmed. Two of the interviews were face-to-face, conducted in meeting rooms in Open University buildings. Apart from the lack of visual stimulus and the inability to observe how healthy the participants appeared, there was no noticeable difference between the face-to-face and telephone interviews. .

Table 4.3 Summary of data collection process

Phase/RQs	Data source	Data collection methods
Pilot All RQs	10 ex-prisoners (9 men, 1 woman, see Appendix F1) Including 1 man from previous research	2 face-to-face interviews, 8 telephone interviews All audio-recorded
In-prison Ethnographic RQ1	51 serving student-prisoners (40 men, 11 women, 10 DNE <sup>1</sup> , see Appendix F2)  42 Other participants	51 face-to-face interviews (hand-written field-notes) in 8 prisons 7 repeat face-face interviews in 2 additional prisons  Mostly face-to-face informal discussions or interviews in prison (hand-written field-notes) but DL provider staff telephone/ email (some audio-recorded)
	Other sources: Technology, learning sessions, learning plans, inspection reports, policy documents	Observation and analysis (hand-written field-notes)
Post-release Longitudinal RQ2	38 released participants in scope (31 men, 7 women, 7 DNE <sup>1</sup> , Appendix F3)  • 28/38 traced (23 men, 5 women, 4 DNE <sup>1</sup> , Appendix G)  • 25/38 interviewed at least once (20 men, 5 women, 2 DNE <sup>1</sup> , Appendix G)  • 19/38 up to 6 contacts in 12 months (15 men, 4 women, 1 DNE <sup>1</sup> , Appendix G)  25 Other participant	Analysis of participant characteristics  Through contacts. Some initial contact audio-recorded  3 face-to-face interviews } all audio- 22 telephone interviews } recorded  Multiple: telephone interviews (mostly audio-recorded), email, social media and written correspondence  Mostly telephone or email informal discussions but some face-to- face discussions with staff in prisons where participants had returned (most telephone discussions audio-recorded)

Note 1: DNE = Did not engage with learning

All the interviews were informal to put participants at their ease but were in-depth and semi-structured (see interview guide in Appendix C) and were all audio-recorded, with the permission of the participant. Despite having seen information sheets and signing consent forms, a discussion before the interview confirmed that they were comfortable with the research, understood the potential publication issues, and were assured of their anonymity. All participants appeared relaxed and happy to talk. The success of these telephone interviews encouraged a greater use of telephone interviews for data collection in the post-release phase of the research.

All the participants had a perception of how their learning had affected their lives since release, and how other people had perceived and supported them. They also had views on the problems facing ex-prisoners and some had strong views on how prison policy, probation policy, distance education policies and society, could change to improve support and well-being of ex-prisoners. As expected, their accounts were necessarily retrospective and their views may have changed with time. Despite these concerns, much of the information these pilot participants provided, guided the focus of data collection and procedures for the rest of the research.

#### **4.3.2 In-prison data collection**

Most prison visits were for one full day. The prison day starts early so to ensure maximum data could be collected, the researcher arrived with the staff before the prisoners 'moved' (were escorted from their cells) if possible. The entrance 'Gate' to or from the education block, which was where most of the interviews took place, was normally a long walk which involved many locked gates and doors. As a visitor, the researcher was escorted by the main gatekeeper contact or another member of teaching staff who had keys. That journey was often an excellent opportunity to discuss how PHDL worked in that prison and for exploring the learning culture and wider prison culture.

All student participant interviews were face-to-face. They were mostly pre-arranged and were organised around the education working day of 3 hours in the morning and 2.5 hours in the afternoon. In some prisons, those prisoners who were to be interviewed also needed to be on the 'prison movement register' which would ensure they were unlocked from cell and allowed to attend education at the required times. It was not, therefore, usually possible to interview students in the more natural setting of their cells where much of their study took place. Nonetheless, it did enable observation of the social aspects of the education department's learning environment, where this was the participant's preferred setting. Often the interviews took place in a small ante-room off the education block or in a corner of a large empty classroom. One interview took place in the association room on the wing although as it was during the working day it was very quiet.

Space is at a premium in a prison. The gatekeepers were often known colleagues and were very helpful but did not always fully understand the need for privacy, so it was occasionally necessary to request a private space for an interview. Most interviews lasted between 45 minutes and an hour but some were longer. The five planned stages were adhered to as much as possible (see Appendix C1) but the prompt sheets were used only where necessary to keep the topic focused around the research question. No audio recording equipment was allowed in the prisons and all interviews were recorded by handwritten field-notes, remaining as true to the participant's words as possible. This was a limitation which was considered during analysis.

Some participants were not interviewed as planned. As stated in 4.2.3, there were various reasons for this. Some had not been on the 'movement register' and therefore had not been unlocked from their cell, some had been removed from the pre-arranged list because they had other appointments or activities such as work outside the prison, solicitor visits or other prison courses. This was not unexpected in a prison

environment where there were many other 'work' or 'security' agendas but sometimes the reason was unknown. Some coordinators had organised the interviews with military precision but in other prisons the list of participants for interview only vaguely resembled the pre-arranged list.

There were also some additional opportunistic interviews with participants who for one reason or another had not been part of the original selection. One such participant was Susan, who arrived early to education one morning. After an initial discussion it became clear that she would be an ideal participant and after the preliminaries, an interview was conducted before everyone else arrived. She became one of the most interviewed post-release participants although it was never quite clear why she had not been on the original list. There were also a few shorter, opportunistic, interviews with eager students during the distance learning session observations while students worked at their computers. Clearly these were not fully private and this was taken into consideration during analysis. Also, as they had not originally planned to participate, they required additional information sheets and consent forms. Most of these, however, were not in scope and were not included in the post-release phase.

Collecting data from participants who did not engage with learning was slightly different, but interesting since it normally involved visits to other parts of the prison such as the industrial workshops. This introduced challenges and opportunities. The main challenge was to find a private space for interview. Also, with the less secure environment, one coordinator felt the need to remain in the room during the interview which may have seriously limited what the participant could divulge. However, these visits did allow the researcher to observe the marked difference between the 'working' and the 'learning' areas of the prison. The distinctly different atmosphere was perceived by many participants and was a common topic in interviews. Conversations with staff provided further opportunity for a different perspective on the prison culture

such as the two trainers who organised the jeans factory. Interestingly, one of the prisoners in that factory was an ex-student-prisoner who had been released from the researcher's local prison many years earlier and provided another spontaneous account of life in and out of prison.

Participant observation and data collection from other sources took place constantly throughout the visits. This included observation of open learning sessions in which student participants and other students worked on their assignments or accessed their material through the Virtual Campus when available, with guidance from staff. As already mentioned above, the walk to and from the 'Gate' was also a good opportunity for discussion with staff. Other such opportunities arose in the staff rooms or whilst chatting with staff over lunch.

One particularly prison, ultimately described as a 'learning' prison (as defined in 4.2.2), which was revisited several times, always included a lunchtime session where prison and education staff would gather in one of the spare classrooms to eat their sandwiches and discuss the day. Those lunchtime sessions were extremely fruitful for understanding why that prison was so successful in supporting PHDL. Field-notes were made either at the time or as soon as possible after the events. Specific memorable quotes were recorded word for word when possible. Where necessary there were also organised interviews with key staff that could provide specific information which shed light on some phenomenon or validated student participants' accounts. For example in one prison, the resettlement office was next door to the technology suite (the Virtual Campus). This was unusual as there was normally at least one locked door between departments. It was therefore convenient to have discussions with the resettlement staff one quiet afternoon when the prisoners had been returned to cells during a security alert where no-one was allowed to leave the prison. It became clear, during

interviews, that prisoners also found the proximity of the Virtual Campus and Resettlement to be very useful (see findings in chapter 5).

As a teaching professional, the researcher was classed by some staff as an 'insider' which was useful for 'frank' conversations about learning in prison. However, this had mixed results with the student participants who sometimes replied with "yes miss". Although a teacher status was normally trusted and the participants did not feel threatened by the researcher, it was not always convenient, especially if the participant was having support issues and wished to discuss other staff. In those circumstances it was necessary to stress again to the participant that the interview was confidential and would not be discussed with others, although undoubtedly there were some things left unsaid. There was, however, one situation which was not confidential as the NOMS permission criteria insisted that if the participant divulged anything which could involve harm or a security breach, that the researcher must inform the authorities. This was added to the information sheet but fortunately such a situation never arose.

Although the plan was to visit each prison only once, there were a number of repeat visits for several reasons. Firstly, as discussed above, one prison had particularly good practice and further visits were required to investigate just why and how PHDL was so successful, and participants felt so well supported, in that prison. Secondly, the early findings from the pilot phase confirmed that perceptions of learning could change over time and it was decided to re-interview some participants whose release dates were close to 6 months. This not only allowed those participants to be interviewed close to release but also enabled previous interviews to be validated and the potential for 'missing' participants from earlier visits to be interviewed.

Other alterations to the research plan included some participants who were not released on the expected date, mostly due to immigration issues, and a few who were transferred to open prisons. The open prisons introduced the opportunity to interview

participants while they were working out in the community yet still under sentence. This led to an extension of the scope for the post-release phase of the research and another 2 prisons to visit. It also introduced another perspective to the research by enabling observation of PHDL in open prisons as none of the open prisons in the original short-listed prison selection had sufficient numbers to be included in the research.

#### **4.3.3 Post-release data collection**

Accessing and interviewing released prisoners was extremely difficult. The plan was to contact participants within a month of release and to arrange a face-to-face interview with further interviews at 2 to 3 monthly intervals. However, that plan was not realised as there were many complications. The contact information they had supplied in their first (in-prison) interview was often outdated. Their lives seemed to be particularly hectic and unpredictable. Most therefore did not have much time to give to the research. Others were in environments which were not conducive to having a researcher around, such as bed and breakfast or hostel accommodation. In view of this and the successful pilot telephone interviews, most post-release data collection was through telephone interviews.

Although the interviews were planned to be in-depth, semi-structured and audio-recorded, the actual progress of the interviews very much depended on circumstances. For example most participants were on mobile phones with poor quality sound or the interview was disrupted by some social activity. Where the telephone interview took place in a hostel, it was not always clear whether the participant was sitting somewhere private. Continuity between interviews was important and interview prompts were adjusted to allow follow-up from the previous interview. This involved either reminding the participant what they were doing the last time they were interviewed or asking specific questions which aimed to build on their previous responses (following Farrall, 2006). All interviews attempted the four specific phases (see Appendix C2) and tried to



be consistent in the ordering of events. Almost all interviews, and even most short telephone calls, were audio-recorded but the quality of the recording was, at times, poor.

As the research progressed, contact with participants was through any means possible which included telephone, text, email, social media and just occasionally face-to-face. Some communication was more useful than others in helping to answer the research questions but any contact helped to assess the whereabouts and well-being of the participant and improved the chances of maintaining further contact. Social media and mobile phone texts proved to be the most efficient in keeping contact with participants, especially those participants who had been deported. However, several participants perceived poor support from the Open University, particularly with regard to online access to their modules (see chapter 6), and I was considered by some to be an Open University employee which at times became a problem. Afram, who was close to completing his degree when he was deported, became verbally aggressive about the Open University although he did later apologise for his outburst.

Additional post-release data was collected from informal discussions with distance learning provider staff, probation staff, key worker mentors, family, friends, employers and even a full-time University dean. These were either in response to a specific query or were aimed at providing background information to the resettlement process and support for the released primary participants.

#### **4.3.4 Other data collection**

There were other opportunities for data collection which spanned the whole research process and which have not been included in the sections above. For example, education stakeholders such as distance learning tutors or learning provider managers were selected for their perceived knowledge of 'transformative' PHDL or their ability to provide background information to specific data collected from student participants.

Many of these were informal telephone discussions or email communications. The researcher role was always stressed before and after these contacts. Other data collected which has not already been discussed comprised the documents and other artefacts such as prison inspection reports, prison-based individual learning plans or prison administration documents. These were observed and analysed for background information or specific data when required. This additional data was captured in field-notes.

#### **4.3.5 Field-notes**

Careful attention to field-notes in this complex qualitative, ethnographic and longitudinal research was vital. There were several different sorts of field-notes. There were the classic notes which were made in the field, such as during prison visits, which attempted to capture the scene. Mundane activities and observations were noted as well as the activities specifically around the learning perceptions being investigated. These field-notes were especially important to bring life to the interview data. Although written quickly, the notes made in interview were as detailed as possible. Some specific quotes were recorded word for word and they were highlighted with quotation marks. Detailed field-notes were also useful for reflexivity in an attempt to identify the researcher's questions during interviews, or other possible reasons for participant perceptions other than researcher assumptions.

Other types of field-notes included an electronic file for each participant which became invaluable during the complicated communications in the longitudinal data collection phase. Everything known about that participant was recorded in the file. For example, their contact information, their offender manager contact details, education progress and everything possible about each communication including audio files, transcribed data and researcher perceptions at the time. In this way it was possible to develop a clearer picture of the participants' change over time. It was also very useful for recalling

previous participant comments or concerns in preparation for the next communication. It was especially useful during analysis to try to identify changes in participants' perceptions and to understand the different trajectories that the participants had taken.

There was also a research diary which was a separate record of thoughts or concerns about the overall progress or problems of the research as a whole. Again this became invaluable as time passed and researcher perceptions changed. All these electronic files were stored on a password-protected computer. Hand-written field-notes and printed transcription notes were stored in lever-arch files in locked cupboards.

## **4.4 Analysis of the data**

Due to the large amount of data collected, only the interviews from student participants were fully coded and analysed. Data from other sources was coded and analysed as required. Some was coded directly from audio through NVivo.

### **4.4.1 The analysis stages**

Following Braun and Clarke (2006), the analysis included the following stages:

#### ***Familiarisation***

All transcription was completed by the researcher. No additional transcribers were used. Everything was typed as written or heard but without additional codes for pauses (unless extreme) that one might expect for discourse or conversation analysis. Anything which added to the 'mood' was noted such as laughing or door-bells or other distractions (especially for audio-recordings of telephone conversations). Punctuation was added where considered appropriate for transcription of audio-recordings but only where previously recorded on hand-written field-notes. As the longitudinal data was complex, preparatory text was added to these transcripts to describe the context. This included, for example, who instigated the engagement, how, when and if there was a

specific purpose or if there had been a specific trauma previously. Although this transcription was time-consuming it enabled the data to be read and listened to many times so that it became familiar.

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that the data should be read at least once but in line with Mason (2002), the data was actually read three times. It was read (or listened to) once literally, for specific words and phrases which provided participant demographic information and distance learning procedures in specific prisons (sometimes this was at the time of transcription). Then it was read (or listened to) interpretively, through and beyond the words, interpreting the participants' comments in the light of their experiences and the context (for example whether the interview was completely private or if what they were saying was current information or historical). The second reading/listening was also an opportunity to check the accuracy of the original transcript. Finally the data was read (or listened to) reflexively, capturing as much as possible of the researcher's part in the data generation. Notes were made at each stage and 'first impressions' text prepared which became the "bedrock for the rest of the analysis" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p87).

### ***Generating initial codes***

The data was loaded into NVivo where small sections of code (between a few words to a few sentences) were given meaningful labels. These labels aimed to capture both the semantic and potential conceptual meaning in the data. As the number of labels increased, so they were layered (see Appendix H1 for an example). In doing detailed coding with multiple layered labels, it was easier to become distant from the transcripts so that the linking and the relationships between categories (see 'searching for themes' below) could be made objectively, providing a "more measured view" (Mason, 2002, p112). However it was not possible to completely anonymise the data for more objectivity since the source was important. For example, the context was important so

the pilot, in-prison, post-release or back-in-prison context remained identifiable. The length of time since release also remained identifiable to ensure that meanings of phrases were clear and changes over time could be exposed. Further subjectivity of the data interpretation was acknowledged as the researcher was very aware of the research questions while completing the analysis. Table 4.4 provides an example of coding with an explanation of the identification labels.

**Table 4.4 Examples of coding**

Data extract	Codes identified
(1) Phase2 31-H3-2-2m I don't feel like a student most of the time. Occasionally when I'm here [education] I do but then you're reminded very quickly on the wing that you're in prison. Obviously that room [VC] is student friendly and you don't feel like you're in prison and [Virtual Campus coordinator]'s good.	student id prison structure key support person prison IT
(2) Phase3 14-V6-1+2m I actually don't see myself as a student anymore because other people have taken that title away from me, basically. Like the bank, the University and so I feel like, basically, an ex-convict that's a waste to society.	student id disillusionment stigma

**Note explaining identification label:**

Extract (1): Phase 2 (In-prison interview), 31 (unique participant ID), H3-2 (originally 3<sup>rd</sup> prisoner to be interviewed in prison H, this was the 2nd in-prison interview), -2m (2 months before release).

Extract (2): Phase 3 (post-release interview) 14 (unique participant ID), V6-1 (originally 6<sup>th</sup> prisoner to be interviewed in prison V, +2 (2 months after release).

**Searching for themes**

After each set of coding had been completed (for example data from one prison visit or one wave of longitudinal data) the labels were examined for relevance to each other and were grouped into emerging themes. Coding was iterative over the course of

eighteen months while new data was still being collected, so the themes changed and new themes were added. A diary of these themes was kept to attempt to keep track of the changing labels and to note returns to the earlier collected data to reanalyse with new labels.

### ***Reviewing themes***

As more data was collected, the themes were checked for consistency and to see if they fitted together into a coherent pattern. Occasionally new and interesting codes were identified which did not fit with current themes and there was a significant shift in the themes. As some themes became more 'important' so other codes were grouped differently. Some themes were merged and the relevance of others changed. For example, post-release data analysis highlighted new labels related to resilience. Although resilience was already a theme in the prison data, the post-release data developed resilience into a major theme. It was interesting because it emerged from a lot of negative labels such as chaos, frustration and disillusionment as it became obvious that some participants were coping better than others with their difficulties.

### ***Defining and naming themes***

Detailed notes were made of the key themes and these were assessed for relevance to the research questions. Working for months with the data in NVivo, the names of the overarching themes changed as more data was collected and the developing narrative changed. Periodically the data from specific layered themes were printed out and manually re-sorted into a number of other possible themes to further clarify the meaning behind the data. Their meaning was checked for how it fitted into the overall storyline and specifically how it answered the research questions. The themes were then renamed accordingly (see finding relationships below).

### ***Producing the report***

Themes were gradually combined into a narrative. As the themes were still changing, the narrative changed several times, especially while the longitudinal data was still being collected, and deciding when to stop the analysis was difficult. However, gradually no new themes were being identified and the changes to the themes were only minor. At this point the analysis ceased and the narrative was clarified.

#### **4.4.2 The order of analysis**

The temporal nature of the data was an important aspect of the analysis and the iterative analysis process allowed numerous opportunities for validation. For instance, analysis commenced as soon as possible after data collection to ensure that forthcoming interviews benefitted from prior findings. Participant data from the pilot phase was therefore collected and partially analysed in order to use the preliminary themes to develop the interview prompts for in-prison interviews or change the schedule (see Appendix H2 for an example). Also, the data collected from the in-prison participants with imminent release dates were fully analysed immediately to ensure that themes could be checked, or missing data collected, at their post-release interviews. There was even some scope for themes from early post-release data analysis to be validated by careful investigation during the remaining prison-based data collection. For example, it became noticeable that participants had not been given enough information to complete their studies post-release so in-prison interviews focused a little more on resettlement information provided. This multiple layering of data was not without its problems, especially regarding researcher involvement and the ethical considerations of helping participants where necessary (see 4.5 and chapter 8).

Despite the complex and ongoing nature of the analysis, ultimately all acceptable student participant data (an example of unacceptable data was poor-quality audio or unreadable text from hand-written fieldnotes, see 4.5) was analysed and used to

support the findings. There were three key themes to emerge from the analysis: structural factors, social support factors and psychological outcomes. The structural factors were mostly barriers to learning and the social support factors mostly supported learning by mediating the structural barriers. The psychological outcomes were the result of the interaction of the structural and social support factors acting on the participants and related to their feelings of personal change and identity.

Most of the data collected from other sources, such as prison and probation staff, education staff and participants' family, was also analysed and used where necessary to validate, or bring meaning to, the students' accounts. In particular they provided evidence for, and validation of, the structural and social support themes.

#### **4.4.3 Finding relationships**

Relationships within the data were identified through re-organising the data in different ways and looking for patterns. For example, to discern personal change through PHDL, it was necessary to have a starting position both educationally and socially. In this case, it was the participants' previous education, criminal history and social identity. It was convenient to consider participants' trajectories, where they were heading before they started PHDL, and how PHDL had changed or deflected those trajectories. The data related to personal change involved a large set of multi-layered codes which made up the transformative sub-theme. Each of the main codes, such as hope, aspirations, identity, self-awareness, pride and achievements, were re-organised under three main headings of increasing internalisation (see 2.5 above and Ryan and Deci, 2000b). The headings of the columns were 'inward-facing', 'outwardly-aware' and 'open-door'. 'Inward-facing' comments related to thoughts and actions from structural factors such as the prison environment. These were mostly extrinsic motivations, such as avoidance of prison life. The 'outwardly-aware' comments related to qualifications and post-release issues such as employment. Although triggered by external factors they were



more internalised than 'inward-facing' thoughts and actions, with increased autonomy. The 'open-door' comments related to more reflective thoughts and actions which were more intrinsic, generative, learning-focussed and autonomous (see Appendix H3 for an example of analysis of the 'aspiration' code). The columns were allocated scores (see 1-3 in Appendix H3). Each participant was traced across the codes and their scores were totalled. Where a participant had entries in more than one column, their scores were averaged but where the participant had two interviews, a score was allocated to each, to highlight any change over time. Then, by investigating the trajectories of the participants, taking particular note of their starting positions (as above), it was possible to estimate whether a participant had been transformed in some way by their PHDL and to crudely grade that transformation. Other data were used to check these analyses wherever possible, such as comments from prison and distance learning provider staff.

Whilst acknowledging that all learners were unique and had their own perspective of change through learning, it was convenient to compare groups of learners to look for patterns although some patterns were immediately evident. For example, while analysing aspirations (as above) it became apparent that those participants who had not engaged with learning had less realistic and more negative aspirations with lower scores (see highlighted text in Appendix H3). The obvious groups for comparison were gender, age, learner engagement and educational attainment. However, there were other less obvious groups, such as prolific offenders, who were able to provide a different perspective of change compared to those who found themselves in prison for the first time. Some comparisons, such as gender, highlighted very few differences whereas others, such as learner engagement, highlighted key differences in psychological outcomes.

Analysis of the data was also guided by “frequency and fundamentality” (Adams et al., 2008, p147) which puts emphasis on those issues which occurred frequently or were deemed to be of fundamental importance. At a thematic level, in an attempt to identify the strength of the relationships in different sub-themes, codes were graded for their importance. This could be determined by their size (the number of times they had been mentioned by participants in a particular code) but also by specific quotes which articulated powerful messages within the code. For example, in the transformative sub-theme, the number of times ‘different(ly)’ or ‘change(d)’ was attached to quotes of feelings was a guide to their importance but occasionally there were powerful quotes highlighting turning points brought about by learning. Similarly, on an individual level, this “frequency and fundamentality” was used to further establish if participants had been transformed by their learning.

A similar process involved the structural sub-themes and those social support sub-themes which the participants had identified as helping or hindering attempts to overcome the barriers, such as access to technology, mentoring and tutor support. Individual relationships across these themes were then identified and in this way the related factors for each of the main themes were built up. The narrative across these relationships was then drafted.

#### **4.5 Validity and ethical considerations**

Chapter 3 discussed the specific risks and challenges which were expected but as the research progressed there were some additional considerations. For example, as audio-recording devices were not allowed in the prisons, in-prison data relied completely on field-notes which did not always record the participants’ exact words or researcher’s prompts. To improve validity, all field-notes were transcribed as soon as possible after the data collection visit. Only those notes which were from ‘solid’ data sets were specifically used in the findings. For example, if there was doubt when

transcribing, a note was made and if data was particularly questionable (for example, where writing was unreadable or the meanings were unclear) the data was discarded. Analysis included a reflexive read-through which, apart from the usual subjective interpretations, also tried to determine the level of researcher involvement in the participant's responses.

There was extensive use of telephone interviews for the longitudinal phase which had mixed consequences. It meant that researcher safety and participants' anonymity were improved and also meant that participants were more accessible and more regular contact was made. Nonetheless, the lack of face-to-face contact in the post-release phase limited the data collection. Situations for released participants could only be imagined by the researcher who interpreted the participants' perceptions and interpretations from small snippets of data. Face-to-face interviews would have enabled the researcher to observe some of those situations; possibly providing richer data and added colour to the interpretations (see also limitations in 8.2).

As explained in 4.4 (above), codes, sub-themes and themes from analysis changed regularly and although a diary of changes was kept, some coding sessions were not fully recorded. This meant that sometimes links between codes were lost. It was therefore not always possible to go back to earlier concepts when the need arose. It is not possible to tell if this affected final results or not. However, there were many further opportunities to validate both the codes and the themes throughout the research process. Supervisions included regular reviews of analysis and there were several conferences in which the researcher was able to test out early themes with practitioners and researchers in other universities. Most importantly, there have been opportunities for several participants to see the emerging findings and they felt that they adequately represented the situation that they remembered.

The major ethical consideration during data collection, which had not been foreseen, was additional researcher involvement in the research process. In particular, there was occasional need for the researcher to help participants who were in difficult situations. For example, providing participants with information which they lacked in order to continue their studies, or becoming a communication link between the participant and the learning provider, and even intervening where injustices occurred. This clearly meant that the researcher moved away from being the objective outsider, becoming more involved in the research process. This may have affected outcomes and is discussed further in chapter 8.

## **4.6 Chapter conclusions**

This chapter has explained how the research was carried out, and how the research plan (from chapter 3) was amended as the research progressed, in order to most effectively answer the research questions. The final numbers of prisons and participants were presented in Table 4.1. The pilot phase consisted of 10 adult ex-prisoners participants who had completed PHDL, only one of whom was from a previous research project. The in-prison phase involved ethnographic fieldwork in 10 prisons in England and Wales with 51 serving prisoners who were due for release and had completed PHDL (or considered but not engaged with PHDL for comparison). The number of prisons expanded from 8 to 10 as some participants were transferred and re-interviewed in open prisons before release.

A summary of how the participants were spread across the different sites was provided in Table 4.2. Only 38 of those 51 in-prison participants were in scope for the post-release phase due to a variety of reasons, but mostly due to inappropriate release dates. Ultimately 28 participants were traced after release and 25 were re-interviewed at least once. In addition to the main student participants there were many other

sources of data which provided additional perspectives that helped to validate, and bring meaning to, the student participants' accounts.

The data collection process was summarised in Table 4.3. The ex-prisoners in the pilot phase were offered face-to-face interviews but they mostly chose telephone interviews and the success of these interviews led to more telephone interviews in the post-release longitudinal phase of the research. Oral data was mostly audio-recorded, except in the prisons where all the ethnographic fieldwork was recorded through handwritten field-notes. Post-release data was collected through any means possible including telephone, email, text and social media. The three data collection phases overlapped and the in-prison and post-release phases ran in parallel for many months, allowing validation across time and context.

The iterative thematic analysis process was very long and complex. A description has been provided of how the labels were chosen and the themes were developed, related and changed over time. An example of coding was provided in Table 4.4 but further examples of analysis are provided in Appendix H. There were a number of additional validity and ethical considerations which have also been discussed.

The three key themes to emerge from the analysis were the structural factors (mostly barriers to learning), the social support factors (mostly supporting learning) and the psychological outcomes which were the participants' resultant perceived change. These led to the connected narrative which answers the research questions. The findings were separated into in-prison and post-release findings, highlighting the different data collection methods and the different contexts. These are presented in the following two chapters.



## **Chapter 5: Pre-release findings: In what ways is prison-based higher-level distance learning transformative?**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous two chapters explained the rationale for a qualitative, ethnographic and longitudinal research. For those participants who had repeat interviews, separate scores were given to establish if there was any change with time approach, and provided details of how the research data was collected and analysed. Perceptions of Prison-based Higher-level Distance Learning (PHDL) prior to release were obtained mostly from the ethnographic data collected from participants within the prisons but also included the rich historical data from the pilot interviews. This chapter provides the analysis of that pre-release data which aimed to answer the first research question:

In what ways is PHDL transformative?

- In what ways can it lead to personal change in the learner?
- How does that change relate to hopes and aspirations for future prospects and life chances?

Section 5.2 presents the participants' reasons for studying PHDL, providing insight into what they expected from their study, and forming a starting point for personal change. Most reasons for studying PHDL stemmed from a prisoner's need to use time usefully but their perception of 'useful' varied considerably and ranged from externally-motivated, prison-focused, reasons to the more internalised personal development and a desire for knowledge for its own sake. This section also introduces the three main themes to emerge from the analysis; that is structural factors, social support factors and psychological outcomes. The themes, which are sets of factors affecting PHDL, and its transformative quality, are explored throughout the rest of the chapter. The structural and social support factors varied substantially from one prison to another and

the concept of a 'learning' prison and 'working' prison, which was proposed in the researcher's previous research, has been utilised to compare findings according to how well prisons valued and supported PHDL (see 2.6.3, 4.2.2 and glossary in Appendix A).

The structural factors which affected PHDL are presented in section 5.3. They consisted of the prison's physical structure, the infrastructure and the organisational structure. The physical structure of the prison included the accommodation, the physical space for learning and the physical effects of security. The infrastructure of the prison included information, communication and technology for learning. The organisational structure within the prison related to the priorities of the different organisations that were responsible for the management of PHDL and the whole learning journey from induction through to resettlement. These structural factors were perceived by participants to be mostly barriers which needed to be overcome in order to continue with their studies, except where there was particularly good practice from a 'learning' prison.

The social support factors are presented in section 5.4. They consisted of a support network which included family and friends, support from individual staff, and a learning community. These social support factors appeared to mediate the structural factors and helped participants to overcome some of the barriers in order to continue studying and to develop through their learning. Once again these varied from prison to prison with a 'learning' prison being the most supportive, with a learning culture. The psychological outcomes are presented in section 5.5. They were associated with personal development through successful participation in PHDL such as self-awareness, positive identity and resilience as well as the mixture of anxiety, hopes and aspirations which participants had prior to their forthcoming release.

The final section (5.6) summarises the chapter, highlights how, when the key factors interacted positively, they encouraged personal change through transformative learning



with significant hope and aspirations for continuation of learning, employment and a brighter future. However, where the participants lacked the necessary support and the resilience to overcome the structural barriers to study, the results were course abandonment, failure and understandably, disappointment.

The characteristics of the participants who contributed to these findings are provided in Appendix F. The names provided are pseudonyms which have been specifically selected to reflect gender and ethnicity. As was shown in table 4.4 (above), to enable a more visible analysis of the impact of context and previous life histories, all quotes have a label which includes the participant's age range and pre-prison qualification. In-prison quotes also begin with a letter code for the participant's prison while pilot study participant quotes begin with time since release.

## **5.2 Why higher-level distance learning? The journey starts here**

The reasons for prisoners to start a PHDL course were many and various. Time was a commodity in prison, most participants highlighted the need to use that time usefully and distance learning was something which enabled them to do that. However, one person's 'useful' was very different from another's. Some participants had specific prison-related reasons to study. For example, they wanted to focus on something and fill their time with something which would prevent them from thinking about being in prison, or they wanted to ease their path through the prison system. It seemed, however, that these participants tended not to fully engage with their learning.

Some participants had employment-focused reasons for starting their PHDL journey as they wanted to achieve qualifications and skills which would help them to gain suitable employment upon release. Others saw PHDL as an opportunity for personal development. The personal development took many different forms but was often related to personal discovery or a desire to change who they were. Some had

completed all the lower level classroom education on offer and wanted to test themselves and see if they really could study at a higher level and change the course of their future. That need to change had been triggered by a variety of reasons but the shock of prison and maturation were key factors.

Some participants simply wanted knowledge for its own sake and chose to study something which interested them. However, commencing PHDL was not easy and most participants would not have actually started their learning journey without the help and encouragement of others. Some prisons were more encouraging than others and the reasons to start and continue PHDL were affected by many factors within the prison.

#### **5.2.1 Prison-related reasons**

Many participants were traumatised by being in prison and a few participants admitted that starting PHDL was just a means of surviving their prison sentence. They were trying to ease their path through the prison system the best way they knew and PHDL suited their purposes. For example, Winston had an Italian girlfriend and wanted to be able to converse with her friends and family so he began an Italian course through distance learning. However, he admitted that it was just making his sentence easier,

*It [PHDL]'s made my sentence easier because it's given me something to focus on but no more than that.*

Winston (R, 25-29, None)

Winston was on his fifth prison sentence, had no secondary schooling and was dyslexic. Unfortunately, although his dyslexia was not assessed or specifically supported, his tutor believed that he did not have the necessary language skills to study at that level and he failed to complete the course. This highlights that PHDL is

not necessarily the right route for everyone and that advice and guidance for starting PHDL was not adequate in some prisons (see 5.3.2).

Simon could also barely read and write when he left school at 15 but he had developed and run a scrap metal business before his imprisonment for a one-off offence and chose to take a business course to help him with his business on release,

*This course covers a bit of everything – European law, consumer law, community law. So it kept me focused and busy and focused up on a law which will help me when I get out.*

Simon, (M, 50-59, None)

His initial reason for studying was to focus away from prison but found that he also gained knowledge which he perceived to be useful after his release. However, he gained in other ways too. His life before prison was very busy so he thought that the time in prison was an ideal opportunity to study as there were not the normal distractions in prison that one would get in the outside world,

*In prison you can slow down and think about it. On the out you're busy 12-14 hours a day and take the little things for granted. Prison removes that stress of everyday life*

Simon, (M, 50-59, None)

These perceptions of time slowed down and the lack of distractions for learning in prison were prominent themes among the participants and are discussed further throughout the chapter.

Nina, in comparison, had completed two years at University before going to prison and she explained that PHDL had been a way for her to maintain her student identity which had helped her to survive her prison sentence.

*It[PHDL]'s how I've been able to cope – studying is something I've always done. It was part of my life.*

Nina, (V, 21-24, A-level+)

However, it will be seen below (5.3.2 and 5.5.2), that despite her previous studies, her PHDL actually helped her to become more self-reliant and more resilient in order to overcome the barriers to complete her studies. This too was a common theme throughout.

### **5.2.2 Employment-focused reasons**

Some participants were hoping to gain some qualification in order to help them to get a better job when they were released from prison. For example, Brian, who left school at 15, had been to prison several times before and had worked his way through the education provided in prison. The last time he was released he had started his own business with the help of the Prince's Trust but he had not known how to run it properly, then a crime which he had committed previously caught up with him and he ended up back in prison.

*I thought I'd lost everything but came here [education department] and decided to get some qualifications and skills*

Brian (P, 25-29, none)

Emma also wanted qualifications. She had enjoyed school and did have some GCSE's but had dropped out of college. She knew that GSCEs would not be a high enough qualification to get her a job now she had a criminal record,

*With a criminal record work will be difficult so I want to do something useful*

Estha (V, 25-29, GCSE+)

Like many other participants, she had completed a lot of basic classroom education in prison. She had also gained computer literacy qualifications and had been a teaching assistant in the Numeracy classroom before she applied for a distance learning course in book-keeping. It will be seen in 5.2.4 and elsewhere in this thesis that for those who were lucky enough to be in prisons which allowed prisoners to develop their responsibilities and encouraged them to progress with their studies, PHDL was perceived to be an excellent progression from the standard classroom education.

### **5.2.3 Personal development**

Many participants were not interested in the qualifications but started their PHDL journey for personal development. For example, Rees was only on his first prison sentence but had been involved in the criminal justice system since his youth. He had studied Fine Art at A level before prison and was a talented wing artist in the prison. He also needed to use his time constructively, but he specifically chose to study psychology because he thought that it would provide answers for him,

*Learning something and not wasting time ... when something went wrong with me I wanted to know why... qualifications are just a bit of paper, I'm not interested in them. ... It's the knowledge which matters.*

Rees (P, 21-24, A-level)

Like many others, Rees had started studying to learn about who he was and how he could improve himself. For those who had been to prison many times before this desire to improve was often linked with stopping their cycle of reoffending. For example, Darren had left school at 15, “*became derailed*” after a family breakdown, and had been in and out of prison ever since. When asked why he started his psychology course he answered,

*I thought I'd try and understand myself a bit ... I done it to know that if you do put your mind to something you really can do it, even though you may think you can't. Don't just give up at that first hurdle ... I think I've just got to that point. I started this sentence at 25 and realised this isn't the life I want any more. Now's the time to start sticking to something*

Darren (M, 25-29, None)

This quote suggests that Darren started his learning as a personal challenge but it also hints at the many challenges ahead and the possibility that Darren may have tried to better himself before but had failed. It will be seen from this thesis that there were many hurdles to jump both in prison and after release. He clearly believed that his learning was a catalyst for a different sort of future and that he needed to continue with it if he was ever going to change. Andrew, like Darren, had been to prison many times before and had matured to a stage where he wanted to change,

*I aim to get a degree ... I was 25 when I was convicted and I've been in prison from then. It's been a long time. Over time the education and growing up – education has brought that on...*

Andrew (H, 25-29, A level)

Andrew perceived that his education had helped him to mature. He was interested in economics and aimed to get a degree but he also just wanted to learn. Sabir wanted to learn, too, but his reasons for learning had changed. Like, Darren, he had originally started studying to challenge himself,

*Initially I just challenged myself to see if I could do it. I didn't look at a degree but then I thought I'd like to get a degree and make my mum proud.*

Sabir (M, 30-39, GCSE+)

So there were several reasons for Sabir to study. He had started as a personal challenge but had perhaps then realised that a qualification was possible and also that family relationships were an important motivator (see 5.4.1). This highlighted how reasons for studying could change as participants developed greater awareness of themselves and others through their learning (see 5.5.1).

#### **5.2.4 Steered into PHDL by others**

Apart from having different reasons for studying, the quotes above have suggested that these participants had just decided to start studying PHDL for themselves but that was rarely the case. For example, Brian (5.2.2) and Rees (5.2.3) were both in the same prison and had been introduced to the possibility of higher-level study at induction. After that, many people in the distance learning department at their prison had encouraged them but it was the prison's distance learning co-ordinator, who Brian considered to have had most effect on him,

*[Distance learning coordinator] has been amazing. She pushed me to do it [PHDL] and has really helped. She's given me motivation to do things I wouldn't have done*

Brian, (P, 25-29, none)

As explained in Chapter 1, prisoners often moved through the prison system during their sentence and were therefore transferred regularly. Sometimes participants had been encouraged to study PHDL by staff at another prison. Estha was on her fourth distance learning course but admitted that she had not originally believed that she could do it. She had been persuaded by a member of the education staff in a previous prison.

*I didn't initially think I'd want to do OU as I thought it would be too academic and not helpful for work but the education officer in [previous prison] told me this was the route I should go*

Estha (V, 25-29, GCSE+)

It will be seen later in this chapter and also in chapter 6 that Estha found that going the distance learning route had been a very good decision for her future employment.

Eric had learnt about distance learning from a peer. He had completed all the education that was on offer in the education department and he may well have stopped there but a friend told him about distance learning.

*I had Level 3's in every course, then one of my friends told me he was doing a degree. That's how I found out about it. They should explain what it is to people – you don't really understand.*

Eric (H, 25-29, GCSE+)

He then went on to apply for distance learning. Apart from showing that Eric was steered into PHDL by his peers, this comment also highlighted that he had not received enough information about PHDL in his prison (see 5.3.2). Andrew was in the same prison as Eric and he too highlighted the lack of information in that prison. In his case he received the guidance he needed from his distance learning provider, although that phone call was organised by one individual in that prison (see 5.4.2 for individual support from staff in prison)

*When I came here I had to look for education ... If you don't ask you don't get here ... I'm interested in Economics but they couldn't find an economics course for me so they suggested Openings [an Access course]. So that steered me in the right direction. I had to phone the [distance learning*



*provider] to find out what I could do. I spoke to an advisor ... They suggested a Business degree specialising in Economics.*

Andrew (H, 25-29, A-level)

This lack of information for higher-level learning was related to the infrastructure within the prison, which was just one of the structures affecting the ability to start or continue PHDL, which are discussed further in 5.3. Andrew's and Eric's prison did not give a high priority to learning, whereas the prison which supported Brian and Rees (above) was a 'learning' prison which provided some good practice for enabling PHDL.

Like all adult learners, these prison learners had come to their learning with different backgrounds and perceptions and hence different expectations of what their learning may provide. Clearly, these participants perceived the prison to be a very specific sort of learning environment and their decisions to study had been affected by the structural factors in the prisons which are expanded upon in the next section.

### **5.3 Structural factors affecting learning in prison**

This section highlights the first main theme to emerge from analysis of the in-prison participant data. Participants perceived that many different structural factors within the prison system affected their learning. These have been grouped into the headings of physical, infrastructural and organisational. The physical structure, although closed and restricted, did provide space for living, with adequate food and accommodation. However, participants also needed space and time to study. The spaces for study included the cells, the library and the education department but prisons varied substantially in how they structured those learning spaces.

The infrastructure of the prison was also important for study. Infrastructure included information and the communication of that information, as well as technology and other resources for learning. The organisational structure of the prison related to the prison

management and the policies and procedures of the many stakeholder organisations that provided services for learning within the prison from induction through to resettlement. Although prisons varied widely, participants found that in most prisons these structures were barriers to study. There were some examples of good practice with learning spaces and resources for learning within a 'learning' prison which fully supported learning. However, the majority of prisons were 'working' prisons which had a stronger focus on work and very little provision for learning.

### **5.3.1 Physical structure**

Prison provided a physical structure in which the participants lived and learned. The strict prison regime, although repetitive, did provide food and accommodation for its inmates. However, the space and time for learning varied widely across different prisons and this section highlights how participants perceived that affected their learning.

#### ***Accommodation***

Susan explained that there was adequate provision for physical needs in prison as she said,

*You only have yourself to think about - 3 meals a day and a warm cell*

Susan (V, 51-60, A-level+)

Simon agreed that living in prison was not a physical hardship in the normal sense. His quote (5.2.1 above) suggested that there was more time to study in prison because the stresses of everyday life were removed. However, he went on to describe the physical closeness within a confined space in prison,

*No physical hardship – with food and warmth ... but mentally its tough ...  
mixing with others I wouldn't normally mix with – offenders who are violent*

*and have mental health issues and all blokes together for a long time and without family.*

Simon, (M, 50-59, None)

Here Simon perceived the physical space, although apparently comfortable, to be unnatural. Stuart expanded on the concept of space and time,

*The thing about prison is that you are in your room [cell] and therefore the discipline is imposed upon you. So that is where there is a difference – in a way you are given time to do your learning but you're forced to, well the opportunity is put there. You can do lots of things in a cell – a lot of people spend a lot of time asleep ... But, you know, the time was there and therefore you had the disciplined time to do the learning.*

Stuart (+2yr, 30-39, None)

### ***Space and time for learning***

Space and time were therefore important features for learning in the structure of any prison. For example, a shared cell meant that private learning space was limited, and in enclosed shared spaces noise could also be a problem. Noise was especially a problem where the inmates were young or uneducated. Brian explained that that sort of environment was difficult for study.

*In [the young offender blocks] it's difficult. There's lots of youngsters and it's hectic. I started there and it's noisy, not much motivation to work.*

Brian, (P, 25-29, none)

Brian was emphasising the difference between the physical spaces for learning. He perceived that living on a wing which included young offenders was less conducive for learning than one which held more mature prisoners. He went on to explain that the

physical spaces for learning also differed in other parts of the prison, as he discussed the difference between the basic education department and the distance learning department. His 'learning' prison was one of very few which actually had a specific area for higher-level independent learners and the differences in the learning spaces were clear,

*Over there, there's basic education – a big difference. Here [distance learning] it's a lot more mature. Here it's more relaxed. Over there [basic education] they're locked in classrooms, I think there's a lot of idiots and so it's quite strict. Over here we're higher level and they don't need restrictions. Over there they just want to kill time and mess about.*

Brian, (P, 25-29, none)

One of the key benefits of the distance learning department in that prison was that it provided a physical space for independent study. A prison education staff member explained.

*The guys up here are given responsibility for their own tutorial. They take it very seriously. There's minimum staffing and you could hear a pin drop. Especially when you have a lot of business students in there, they have a really good thing going. They take it to a different level.*

Prison education staff (P, ETE coach)

However, the physical space provided for distance learning in that 'learning' prison was the exception and in most other prisons the space and time for independent learning were far more difficult to find. For example Nina, who had been attending University when she was arrested, explained that one of the barriers to studying in prison was the physical work she was required to do as well,

*So when I came here I was a cleaner again. This is a working prison – you have to work or be locked up. You get tired working.*

Nina, (V, 21-24, A-level+)

Here Nina perceived the physical structure of a ‘working’ prison to be one in which prisoners were locked in their cells unless they worked but she also suggested that the work was menial and not compatible with learning. Afram, who had had a long sentence and been in many prisons, perceived that the physical structure of his previous ‘working’ prison meant that he could not communicate adequately with the person who managed distance learning (the distance learning coordinator) as she was physically positioned in a different part of the prison.

*They are totally against education there ... They have big workshops and they want everybody to work, not to educate themselves. For me it was very hard to see [distance learning coordinator] - she was in G wing and I was based in J wing. My applications did not reach her...*

Afram (M, 40-49, A-level+)

It will be seen below (5.3.2) that Afram’s lack of communication was accentuated by the infrastructure in that prison. Colin, who was on his third sentence and had started a criminology course, stressed the boring work he did in the workshop of his ‘working’ prison but also highlighted that working had prevented him from accessing the library to study as it was physically in another part of the prison and was not open in the evening.

*I’m working in the workshop but its tedious – I sew about 10 boxes a day... Library is meant to be once a week but I’ve only been once in the last 6 weeks.*

Colin (S, 21-24, none)

In comparison, the library in Malcolm's 'learning' prison was opened in the evening for those who needed it.

*It's opened 6-7.15 because we can't make it in the day ... They open it normally whenever staff can work late. If there's staff and an officer then they let me know and I can come up.*

Malcolm, (P, 21-24, None)

The library was perceived by some to be a physically more conducive learning space than the cell. It will be seen in 5.3.2 that it also usually contained technology which was an essential part of the infrastructure for distance learners and that too varied significantly across prisons.

### **5.3.2 Infrastructure**

Information, communication and resources were a problem for participants in most prisons but how much of a problem very much depended on the infrastructure for learning in the prison. Participants particularly perceived the need for information when they entered a prison so they could start or continue their PHDL; then they needed information and resources, especially technology, to actually complete their studies during their sentence; then as release approached, information, guidance and resources were needed so that further learning or employment could be organised before release or sufficient information provided so participants could continue their learning after release. Once again, a 'learning' prison was perceived to provide more effective information and resources for learning than most other prisons and participants in a 'working' prison found a distinct lack of information with very limited resources for learning.

### **Information at induction**

The induction process in a prison set the scene for learning or working in that prison and identified what emphasis the prison placed on learning. It could provide participants with the necessary information and guidance they required to take full advantage of the services and resources for learning within the prison. For example, Sally remembered the good, detailed, induction in the prison in which she resided before her release.

*It was very structured, you get very detailed induction – the whole department ... each lady gets a different pathway, given a sentence plan with what you need to achieve before you leave. You get given targets as you move through your sentence, you like see where you are.*

Sally (+1yr, 30-39, GCSE)

She considered this emphasis on good information and individual learning enabled her to take the right direction in her learning and led to good employment when she was allowed to work outside the prison through Release on Temporary License (RoTL).

Rees also perceived that he had a good induction. He certainly appreciated the information and the speed with which the process occurred when he first arrived.

*I mean, they were informed and they came and saw me within 3 days of me arriving. I put in an App [application] on the Thursday and [education coordinator] came and had a chat with me. So the speediness of it was there, do you know what I mean?*

Rees (P, 21-24, A-level)

Staff in the distance learning department of his 'learning' prison described how new prisoners were interviewed and asked to identify their ultimate goals for their release.

They were then given a detailed learning plan to guide them towards those goals which was also incorporated into their sentence plan. They were not however, pushed into education. They just needed to ask.

*The fact that the onus is on them is a massive part of it. If you don't turn up you don't get it. Those who really want to do it are motivated. The prisoners have their own action plan. We give them a pathway to go down.*

(P5, Prison education staff)

However, the provision of good information at induction was an exception and most participants, like Andrew and Eric (in 5.2.4), complained about the lack of information for learning when they first entered prison so applying for PHDL, and attempting to continue PHDL on prison transfer was often very difficult.

Ernie had been transferred to an open resettlement prison for his last six months before release. Such prisons were designed to prepare prisoners for release and set up employment opportunities. Ernie was disappointed to find that there were no information, resources or planned activities which would help him develop.

*There's nothing I can do here that's going to help me go forward in life. This is a perfect example of a [derogatory expletive removed] prison.... In a D cat there might be a lot of people working outside the gate which is a good thing. But still at the same time a lot of people in here are walking around, working – but what are they working towards? As soon as they walk out that gate what is there to go to? They're not going to go out the prison and work in [a company which provides menial work within the prison] are they?*

Ernie (L, 25-29, Low-GCSE)



Here he was talking about an open prison but his comments suggest that this was also a 'working' prison which put an emphasis on menial work. He was interviewed shortly after the week-long induction and he explained how it was very negative and unhelpful in providing the structured information and guidance needed by anyone who wished to do anything other than menial work. He went on to explain that he felt that instead of telling prisoners about the 'dead-end' work which was available in the prison, the induction should have been expounding the virtues of PHDL and all the things that prisoners could be doing to really make a difference in their future lives.

*I got to thinking that what if all this induction was showing me what I could be doing ... showing us about opportunity and the kind of life we can live after, that would be beautiful ... Cos most of us have never seen that other side of the picture you know ... so we need to get into our head that we want to go to University. We need someone to sit with us and talk to us and tell us that we want to do Open University and we would do it. [original emphasis]*

Ernie (H, 25-29, Low-GCSE)

These comments emphasise Ernie's perception that PHDL had made the difference to him and clearly had hopes that it would be of benefit in the future. They also show that he wanted more people to have the benefits of higher-level learning but most importantly, these comments indicate the importance of information for learning and for potential change through learning.

### ***Communication and resources for learning***

Information for learning was not just important at induction but throughout the learning journey in prison. However, communication of that information was not straightforward as prisoners could not, for example, communicate directly with their distance learning providers but must communicate via a distance learning coordinator within the prison.

Unless participants were able to communicate directly with the prison's distance learning coordinator by being physically in the education department, they needed to communicate through applications (Apps). Unfortunately these Apps often did not reach the right destination or if they did, they were not actioned appropriately. The system was often too dependent on individuals. This was very frustrating for those who had assignments or course start deadlines to meet. For example Afram, who in 5.3.1 emphasised the physical problems of accessing the distance learning coordinator in his previous 'working' prison, found communication with them very difficult,

*I should have gained a degree [by now] but .... it was putting in Apps for courses and then coming back after course started or finding out which one [course] is possible in prison.*

Afram (M, 40-49, A-level+)

He perceived that the number of lost or delayed communications and hence course non-starts or failures, had prevented him from completing his degree before leaving prison. The consequences of this for Afram's continued studies will be discussed further in chapter 6.

The application process was also used for gaining access to resources in the education department. Like all distance learners, these prison-based distance learners needed resources for learning. Resources were often scarce. Most study was done in the cell which sometimes did not even have a desk, let alone any technology, so participants needed to gain access elsewhere to such things as computers with appropriate software and DVDs. Once again prisons varied and it was sometimes a lottery as to whether adequate resources were accessible. Lucy was very frustrated by the process for gaining access to learning resources in her 'working' prison. Lucy worked in a charity outside the prison during the day and in order to attend education to use the computers for a few hours, she had to complete an App for a movement slip which

would be signed by the education manager then sent on to the prison (security) officers who would allow her to be excused from work for one half day. She was thinking of applying for a transfer to a prison which provided easier access to laptops which could be used in-cell,

*I was going to transfer to [another prison]. They have access to laptops, one week at a time on a library card. Here I put in an App ... and get a movement slip*

Lucy, (V, 21-24, A-level)

Susan agreed that in-cell technology was needed for distance learning. Distance learning provider material included DVDs and other material which meant access to a computer was essential. Susan worked in the library so had a little more access to the education department than Lucy but having access to computers and a DVD in the education department was not enough because that was not where she studied,

*I need it at night when I'm studying. A DVD is fundamental to the course.*

Susan (V, 51-60, A-level+)

Susan particularly specified the lack of a DVD but she also lacked computer technology in her cell as she admitted that she had always hand-written her assignments as she was not able to type them up in the time available during the day. Nina, having been used to University study prior to prison, found the lack of resources particularly difficult. She had two sessions a week in which she could use the computers in the education department but her comment here explained further why these resources were problematic for study,

*It's really difficult when you haven't got the proper resources and stuff. When it comes to meeting deadlines ... Sometimes I have to wait for a space on IT and type up assignment ... Last week I came to do my third assignment. They'd changed logins and all my work was gone. I had no access. My work wasn't updated on the system.*

Nina, (V, 21-24, A-level+)

These quotes show the frustration felt by most participants at the lack of resources for learning and the determination which they needed to overcome such difficulties. All participants reluctantly accepted that Internet access was unavailable in prison and managed as well as possible with the, sometimes poor, alternatives. Occasionally, the distance learning tutors would send in additional material to help participants overcome not being online. However, this material also needed access to that technology which was only available at certain times.

*The tutor sent some stuff in but I didn't have access – like activities I couldn't do them. I felt really stupid. Some of the assignment was on a tutor forum so I had to do other stuff. Sometimes you want to get another perspective*

Nina, (V, 21-24, A-level+)

Here, Nina had been unable to access the additional material from her tutor but also she was frustrated by the lack of access to other students' views. Susan was studying international development and really needed the Internet to gain access to media information but found daily newspapers and books in her previous prison were a useful alternative. However, even that was lacking in her current prison,

*In [previous prison] I had the Guardian every day but here there are no papers at all ... I also had lots of books but here it's a struggle to get*

*anything ... The library will look odd things up on the Internet occasionally but you can't have 3000 people asking for that.*

Susan (V, 51-60, A-level+)

Her comment pointed out that, although limited, the library was a place where participants could sometimes find resources for learning. Abdul had originally found good access to resources in the library but he had changed jobs and access deteriorated,

*At first I had a self-study job in the library – I had a DVD and could use the computer. But then I was working – packing T-bags ... I found it very difficult to study – doing maths and didn't have the calculator I needed.*

Abdul (H, 25-29, A-level)

Although showing that the library was a useful place to study, it also highlighted again the difficulties of gaining access to appropriate resources for those working in the workshops. Sabir, however, perceived the library in his prison to be limited and also suggested that lack of access to the Internet meant that he was disadvantaged in his marks for assignments,

*Fellow students on the outside have better access to information, like access to the Internet and they'll get better marks. For example, we get given books but there are others that the library doesn't have. Like the last assignment, I ordered 2 books but the library couldn't get them because they were new.*

Sabir (M, 30-39, GCSE+)

Sabir stressed that lack of Internet access limited his ability to research his subject and thus reduced his potential for personal development. Jamie perceived that lack of

Internet access meant that he was missing out on vital communication with a tutor and other students,

*There's no access to stuff you need, Internet and all that. This course I'm doing now, the tutor group I can't get to, it's a bit of interaction, feedback. It's nice to get feedback. You thrive on it.*

Jamie (M, 30-39, none)

Lack of interaction with tutors or someone to give feedback was cited as one of the main reason for non-completion of PHDL by those who did not engage with their studies. As Jamie says, it was something many participants thrived on and aided their social development. Nina was also frustrated by the lack of communication with her tutor,

*It's really hard not having other students. I'm used to doing group work. There was no-one doing [PHDL course], no-one to talk to about it. I didn't know whether what I was doing was right or wrong ... Because of negative things like not emailing [the] tutor, I did feel isolated quite a lot.*

Nina, (V, 21-24, A-level+)

Having been a student prior to prison, she was used to working in groups and felt the isolation from her tutor and other students more than most but it will be seen (in 5.5.2) that it was that very isolation which helped Nina to develop the inner strength which would help her to overcome difficulties which were to come after release.

Most participants, although complaining about the lack of information and resources, were struggling on with their studies, trying to overcome the hurdles where possible, and hoping that resources might improve. As explained in section 1.3 (above), the Virtual Campus, the National Offender Management Service's new IT system, was designed to improve access to information but it did not feature very significantly in the

lives of the participants in this research. Many participants had never heard of the Virtual Campus, some participants said they had heard it was coming to their prison soon and some said they thought their prison had the Virtual Campus but it was not being used. Of those participants who had used the Virtual Campus there were mixed feelings. Some thought that it was promising but was not yet fully functioning and was not accessible by many prisoners because it was only open during the working day. Abdul explained why the Virtual Campus computers were not suitable for him,

*I don't use the Virtual Campus as such I just come in and do my work. I only use Microsoft WORD. I have a program on a CD [for PHDL course] and I use a laptop. The Virtual Campus computers won't read the CDs so I need to use the laptop.*

Abdul (H, 25-29, A-level)

The computers had been designed without CD drives to improve security but this had meant that the distance learning material could not be loaded onto the system directly. The prison staff member explained that the only alternative was to apply for the CD to be loaded onto the Virtual Campus system, centrally, which required clearance and could take a year so was therefore unacceptable. The use of laptops was not common, so it was lucky that Abdul was able to access one. Estha had also heard of the Virtual Campus which had been installed at her prison for several years but was not accessible to learners. She was frustrated by the slow improvements and had one of her courses cancelled because she could not access the Internet,

*I have heard of the VC. I would love it if it worked. [the previous prison] was the same – it was there and ready to go. If only they would get the [distance learning provider] website up on there. It would be so much better access.*

Estha (V, 25-29, GCSE+)

This quote emphasises again the frustration at the lack of technology for learning. Despite suggestions that technology should be improving, nothing much seemed to be happening on the Virtual Campus.

Ernie, who had used the Virtual Campus for his distance learning studies, was even more critical. He was annoyed that there was no Internet access and nothing which he perceived to be helpful for the distance learner,

*The Virtual Campus is not a Campus and it's not Virtual. There's nothing special about it because it's just a computer.*

Ernie (H, 25-29, Low GCSE)

He did not like the new system because it provided nothing new in terms of resources and information but meant less time for study, as the distance learning sessions he had been able to attend previously had been stopped in favour of one Virtual Campus session.

Rees's 'learning' prison did not have the Internet for prisoners and was still awaiting installation of the Virtual Campus when this research took place but Rees perceived that he had all the resources he needed to get the full benefit from his learning,

*Everything I needed to get my hands on I could – materials, quiet time for study, and anything from the Internet – they could also get it for me so, you know, [P, this prison] itself for education – its brilliant.*

Rees (P, 21-24, A-level)

As in other prisons, most prisoners worked all day but the difference in this prison was that the infrastructure catered for learning so resources for distance learners were available outside working hours. The distance learning manager explained how they enabled their learners to gain access to the information and resources they needed.



*The majority of the distance learners are in full time work. We realise we need to do evenings ... we have [dedicated prison officer] – he does 3 evenings a week so we can then open up on an evening.*

(P1, distance learning manager)

In addition, many distance learners in this 'learning' prison had easier access to resources through employment opportunities within the education department. These roles helped to build a sense of community by encouraging peer support and gave them responsibilities which enabled them to gain skills for personal and social development in preparation for release and work (see also 5.4.3 and 5.5.4).

### ***Information and resources for post-release***

As the time for release approached the need for information and resources became increasingly important as participants wanted to continue with their studies post-release or use their education to get appropriate employment. Most participants highlighted their lack of information about when, what and how they were to continue their studies or gain appropriate employment. For example, Andrew, having been told [by the researcher] about what was required for him to continue his studies on release, just 2 months before his release, said,

*No-one has ever been here from the OU to tell me what you've just said. Nobody knows what to do to continue. Unless you're doing a 12 stretch then you aren't able to finish. Most people won't do it. It's off-putting. It's a waste of money and of people's time. The hope is taken away if you can't finish.*

Andrew (H, 25-29, A level)

There were pockets of good practice but sometimes those who had received good

guidance appeared to have received it opportunistically through chance meetings.

*The Chaplain said to me 'how about [working for a religious charity]?' I spoke to the girl who ran the IT because the Resettlement office was next door – she grabbed a bloke from Resettlement and said 'I have this guy, will you have a word with him?' And they organised the interview and it all went from there. So, to some extent I had to manufacture it myself.*

Paul (+4y, 60-69, A level)

Some prisons were set up as specific resettlement prisons which were expected to have better infrastructure for resettlement and offer Release on Temporary License (RoTL) in preparation for release but as Ernie highlighted (above) these were not useful to higher-level learners as they concentrated on menial work. Other participants were also unhappy with the RoTL opportunities. For example, Simon considered that RoTL was not adequately promoted in his prison,

*... only a handful of people do that [RoTL]. Others meet the criteria but they don't do it. ... only 5 or 6 go out ... The notice board on the wing has about 6 different employers ... but I've not met anyone who does it. I applied about it twice about 6 months ago but there was no follow up.*

Simon, (M, 50-59, None)

Women appeared to have more RoTL opportunities than men and although the 'working' prison (V) mentioned previously, provided poor communication and technology for learning, participants did appreciate its good resettlement opportunities. Susan had actually transferred to that prison for its resettlement facilities and was completing a teaching assistant qualification. Estha, who had started her learning for qualifications, had mixed feelings about the infrastructure in that prison. She did not have a learning plan so there were no structured goals but she had applied for college

to do accountancy qualifications on day release. The college place did not materialise but she did secure a good employment opportunity on RoTL. However, her outcomes were more related to a variety of support from individuals than good infrastructure in the prison (see 5.4.2 below).

In comparison, in Brian's 'learning' prison, students had their own learning plan and were individually provided with whatever resources they needed to help them to fulfil their aspirations. In particular, many of the participants were encouraged to contact colleges or universities and apply for full-time education before release. It will be seen (in 5.5.4 below) that they all had significant hopes and aspirations for their future.

As well as the information and resources within the prison, Brian's 'learning' prison also provided mentors who were prison officers seconded to work with some of the released prisoners after they were released. Brian had been through the system several times before. He had a mentor last time he was released and knew that they were helpful so fully intended to accept their support after release.

*Before, I had a mentor and it worked ok but it stopped when I didn't need them. Now I realise I need a lot of support even though I don't feel I need it.*

Brian, (P, 25-29, none)

Here Brian showed that he had developed personally during this sentence and had become more aware of the need for support. A mentor explained how he hoped to help people like Brian after release,

*The biggest problem is keeping them busy before they get into employment. I pick them up and take them for coffee or to the Jobcentre. I just need to have a chat with them and sometimes be quite frank.*

(P4, post-release mentor)

It will be seen in chapter 6 that the mentor who supported Brian after release did make a significant difference and helped him in many ways but particularly helped to prevent him from returning to prison.

### **5.3.3 Organisational structure**

The organisational structure of a prison affects the PHDL process. In most prisons, staff from many different organisations, such as the education provider and the advice and guidance provider, had an effect on the PHDL process. Where the organisational structure of the prison supported learning and encouraged those different organisations to work together, participants were provided with the necessary environment to foster transformative learning. However, when prisons did not have that organisational structure, their policies and priorities were more likely to create barriers for learning. It was seen in the previous sections that Brian's 'learning' prison had a space for independent learning and an infrastructure which catered for distance learners. The positive aspect of the organisational structure of that prison was that the staff in the independent learning space worked together towards one goal which was student-centred. It is important to note, however, that the particular 'learning' prison (P, above) was a private prison where all the staff were employed by the same organisation (see Box 8.1). That is not to say that all private prisons were perceived by participants to be 'learning' prisons, just that their organisational structure was simpler. That 'learning' prison clearly had a student-centred attitude and an organisational structure which worked but many of the prisons did not have good coordination and thus PHDL suffered.

#### ***Fragmented and uncoordinated***

Dan's comment below sums up what many participants perceived. Dan was an intelligent public sector worker who spent only a short time in prison during which he

managed to complete one PHDL course and gain an insight into the prison culture. He explained his perception of the fragmented education in his prison.

*The education is chaotic, fragmented, uncoordinated. The priority is basic skills ... no criticism of the Governor or of the objectives, just the coordination of the staff ... The prison education is run on a shoestring and it's the size of a large primary school. I got very frustrated. ... The lads on degrees have suffered from not having someone with a pro-active attitude. They need someone who is pro-active about their welfare.*

Dan (+6m, 60-69, A-Level)

This was a common perception among participants, although others did not express their views quite as eloquently as Dan. This sort of fragmented organisation meant that many participants were not able to take full advantage of their learning. Basic skills were the priority within the education department and many prisons were not interested in progressing learning beyond that. Kevin, who had been in the criminal justice system for most of his short life, was now in a 'learning' prison but talked of other prisons,

*G [Cat B prison], K [Cat C working prison] and C [Cat B local YOI] - they didn't have Distance Learning. As soon as you got past Level 1 Literacy and Numeracy that's all they were interested in.*

Kevin, (P, 21-24, low GCSE)

Other parts of the prison had other priorities. As mentioned above, most prisoners had to work but there were other activities which were considered part of their sentence plan and had much higher priority than PHDL. For example, there were various types of intervention such as behavioural courses which were part of their sentence plan. Stuart, who had left school at 13 and had been in the Criminal Justice system since his youth, explained that he did not think that the mix of interventions worked well for him.

*I was doing education as well [as a 6 year long psychology course],  
cooking and IT and social studies. I don't think the mix worked well. You've  
got to do one or the other. Psychology side, you put a lot into that. When  
you're doing a long sentence like I did you shouldn't get it all crammed into  
one – you should take your time. They were not working together.*

Stuart (+2yr, 30-39, None)

Many participants specifically said how they had to give up their PHDL courses because the other courses took preference. There often appeared to be a real conflict in priorities. The sentence plan took absolute priority and this teacher explained why prisoners had to give up their PHDL sometimes,

*Unfortunately sentence plan is compulsory so if they don't do it then they  
don't get RoTL. If they refuse, the probation/offender supervisor will give  
them High Risk as they haven't improved.*

Georgina (P10, education staff)

Sabir, was a recovering drug addict and needed to complete the drug-treatment course as it was part of his sentence plan and which he did find very useful. Afterwards he was asked to stay on as a peer supporter on the course. This he was happy to do but they also asked him to give up his distance learning course.

*They kept me as a peer supporter for the drug-treatment course. They  
didn't want me to do Open University. They thought it would be a distraction  
– it wasn't and I did it anyway.*

Sabir (M, 30-39, GCSE+)

This quote highlighted the conflicting priorities of different organisations working in some prisons. The peer supporter role, as will be seen below (in 5.4.3), was very good

for developing maturity and self-confidence but Sabir was being asked to choose between two things which were beneficial and could have been complementary. A library orderly was a similarly responsible role which allowed Estha good access to learning while she worked, but she explained that finances had forced her to move away from that job.

*I was originally in the library as an orderly, I enjoyed that but it was not enough money. I needed to start saving up for my release so needed to get a job which paid more.*

Estha (V, 25-29, GCSE+)

This quote highlights the inequality in pay structure where learning roles often paid less than menial work, especially in a 'working' prison. Financial independence was an important factor, especially for those close to release, and many participants found the need to take inappropriate work in prison which was unhelpful for learning.

### ***The balance of power***

The determination which Sabir showed in not giving up his PHDL course (above) was a common thread among those participants who were considered to be transformed by their learning. However, that determination could also lead to further conflict if it affected the balance of power in the prisoner-staff relationship. Dennis explained why those prisoners who were studying needed to be constantly aware of how they interacted with the staff.

*When you attain a certain level of education ... you use words that for you as an individual are normal but you use them every day. It's very hard to go backwards in yourself when you've been [pause] when you've gone so far forwards, if you understand what I mean. So when you find yourself talking to someone or arguing a point, you use words and you suddenly*

*have that epiphany where they don't understand what you've just said. And they know that you know and that is the worst thing that can happen. It really is. And you've got to smile, but you realise that a captive is no longer captive, they are physically, but mentally you are above and beyond and they know it and you know it and that becomes bloody hard work, it really does.*

Dennis, (+10y, 40-49, Low GCSE)

Dennis's comment clearly emphasises the issue that he had perceived relating to the power struggle with staff but his perception of being moved forward so far also suggested that he had been transformed by his learning. This quote also raises the question of staff training and the priorities of different prisons and organisations with respect to providing professional development for their staff. The particular power issue in Dennis's quote may have been alleviated by improved education for staff.

Not everyone had Dennis's concept of power. Paul explained his perception of relationships with officers on the wing.

*I never had a problem with an officer.....I didn't give them any ammunition to be pushed about,*

Paul (+4y, 60-69, A-level)

and with the education staff, Paul had a different relationship,

*We all had a reasonable and professional understanding of each other and it blended together well. It wasn't an 'us or them' or anything like that. We all thought of ourselves as equals and got on with it.*

Paul (+4y, 60-69, A-level)



Here Paul highlights that some PHDL students were considered with respect and as equals by education staff in some prisons. Manwell actually thought PHDL improved staff relations. He had studied several distance learning courses in a variety of different prisons during his long sentence and when he was asked what he considered to be the benefits of PHDL he answered,

*Communication skills and relations with staff get better – it starts to build up.*

Manwell (M, 30-39, A-level)

These different perceptions of power were prison-dependent but it was possible that personal development of staff could make a difference in how well they performed. This 'learning' prison manager provides his perception of why their prison worked well,

*We have induction for staff from the wing. Those staff then pass on what they know. G and R know so much about the regime. Teachers like T who don't know about the regime can ask plus we've all seen the things that fail. There's been an attitude in prison of 'bums on seats'. We think, how can we motivate you to do what you need to do?*

(P5, Head of Distance Learning Department)

Brian, who had a peer partner role in the distance learning department of his 'learning' prison, explained proudly that the staff he worked with were very good and his role enabled him to improve relations for other prisoners too.

*I'm working up here [distance learning department] as a peer partner so we have a lot of employability and management courses. I'm a link between staff and prisoners. I do enjoy that. It keeps me busy and gives me a lot of access to education. Everything I've asked to do I've been allowed to do.*

Brian, (P, 25-29, none)

However, the staff Brian mentioned were not the officers on the wing, who he considered to be almost irrelevant to his world in the distance learning department.

*They're not really involved. Their job is to keep people in control. They're just officers – it's not their job. No connection.*

Brian, (P, 25-29, none)

Here Brian had partitioned himself from the prison and the prison officers who were connected to the security within the prison. He was a student in the distance learning department and a peer partner and he perceived that as his learning community which was removed from the prison. That concept of a learning community was an important social factor which supported learning and is discussed further below (see 5.4.3). However, Brian's concept of staff in his 'learning' prison was in stark contrast to Afram's perception of staff in his 'working' prison,

*... SO[security officer]'s would not deal with the simplest of applications. It was proper mental torture. I complained but they had the key to the complaints box.*

Afram (M, 40-49, A-level+)

Once again, this comment highlighted the perceived differences between prisons and the potential for severe hardship in trying to study in a 'working' prison environment, especially if, as in Afram's case, there were issues with physical, infrastructural and organisational structure in the prison. However, whether the structure of the prison was pro-actively in favour of distance learning or not, there were often individuals or groups within the system or outside the prison who could provide a social support network which worked independently to help participants towards transformative learning.

## 5.4 Social support factors: A network of support for PHDL

This section highlights the second main theme to emerge from analysis of the in-prison participant data. Participants perceived a number of different individuals, situations or groups which had made a difference to their learning journey in prison. These social support factors formed a network of support which appeared to mediate some of the structural factors. They included family, learning communities and peers, as well as specific individuals working for the organisations which provided services within the prison. They provided participants with opportunities to develop confidence, self-esteem and social skills and helped them to overcome some of the barriers to studying in prison which had been created by the structural factors described in the previous section.

### 5.4.1 Family and friends

Participants provided many examples of how relationships with family had made a difference to their studies. Family was often a great comfort to participants, both as providers of additional resources and also as motivators. For example, Tristan felt that his family kept him motivated,

*Mother and father are there to support me. My older sister is also there for me – to keep me on the right track.*

Tristan (P, 18-20, GCSE)

The relationship worked both ways as he was concerned that his younger brother was keeping bad company so Tristan needed to succeed at his studies and be a role model for him,

*I'll be sharing a bunk with him [younger brother when released]. I'll have plenty of time now to show him the right way.*

Tristan (P, 18-20, GCSE)

Andrew was confident that he would be able to continue his studies after release because he was supported by his mother,

*My mum has a few degrees herself. When she [mum] heard I was doing it, well ... she will make sure I get what I need to do it*

Andrew (H, 25-29, A-level)

The pride with which Andrew talked about his mother suggested a supportive relationship and the potential for good support upon release. However, sometimes the family relationship was traumatic and a barrier to learning. For example, Sabir, whose reason to start studying was to make his mum proud (see 5.2.3) explained why he had been unable to continue with his last course,

*My brother was stabbed to death in 2010 – that affected me – when it happened I was doing Social Science, I had to stop doing it and go to [another prison] and see a psychologist*

Sabir (M, 30-39, GCSE+)

This quote hinted at the kind of background that [some?] participants had come from and would be returning to after release. However, some did not have family relationships either to support or distract. Kevin had been trying to contact his mother to tell her that he was studying and had really changed and would want to continue when he was released but she was not responding. He had been informed that she had changed her telephone number to avoid being contacted. He was also a father of a 3 year old boy but he had no contact with him or his ex-partner. Perhaps that was why Kevin had gained so much support from prison officers and education staff and likened them to a family (see for example, 5.4.2).

Friends did not feature very highly in participants' accounts of learning in prison. The term 'friend' here denotes those prisoners who were friends but not peers, or friends from outside prison as peers are discussed below (in 5.4.3). It was apparent that some participants were concerned that friends outside had not visited them as often as they would have liked but there was very little mention of receiving support from friends. Eric did mention that a friend had provided him with the necessary information to access charities when he was released.

*My friend joined a charity. He phoned them before he got out and they gave him a placement... my friend told me how to go about it.*

Eric (H, 25-29, GCSE+)

This again highlights the lack of information generally provided to prisoners who are due for release and the worry this causes them.

#### **5.4.2 Support from individual staff**

Prisons varied in how much they supported PHDL and it has been seen that the 'learning' prison was perceived to have physical, infrastructural and organisational structures which enabled the learning process but most other prisons did not. However, participants identified specific individuals within all prisons who supported them in their learning journey. These individuals worked for different organisations inside or outside the prison walls and made a significant difference to whether participants were able to successfully engage with their learning or not. The difference was that in a 'learning' prison, those individuals worked with the system, whereas in other less supportive prisons, the individuals worked against the negative structures in the prison.

#### ***Prison education staff***

Sometimes however, it was merely being treated with respect which made the difference. Stuart remembered one particular teacher from one of his first prisons,

*There was a woman [in a young offender institute]... she understood that a lot of people had had a troubled childhood. They took extra time. They knew how to talk to you – it was not like the school environment. Obviously some rules – can't let you take liberties but apart from that – you were treated [treated] like an adult.*

Stuart (+2yr, 30-39, None)

Estha explained, in 5.2.4 above, that the education manager in one prison had helped her to take the PHDL route. Here she added that she had felt lost initially and why it was so important that someone gave her that helping hand,

*You're so closed in. There are options but I don't know what to do because I've never been in this position before. But who do I go to and ask? What am I meant to do?*

Estha (V, 25-29, GCSE+)

As PHDL students could not communicate with their distance learning provider directly, most participants valued the support they received from the person in the prison who managed the distance learning (the distance learning coordinator or manager). Many participants stressed how important that person was to them and their effectiveness could make a huge difference to the success of the learning. Those who did not fully engage with their studies cited lack of support from the distance learning coordinator as one of the main problems (often due to them being overworked).

Kevin, was a recovering alcoholic and was in the same 'learning' prison as Brian, Rees and Tristan. He explained how he had been supported by various staff within the prison. Firstly, one of the teachers,

*I've got a bookcase upstairs [distance learning department] and [P, teacher]'s upstairs – she's my tutor and very supportive. I wouldn't have done it without [P, teacher]. She's like a friend as well as a teacher.*

Kevin, (P, 21-24, low GCSE)

Then he explained that a prison officer on the wing was also encouraging,

*I know he will ask me about my coursework and they're excited and happy for me. It sounds crazy but it's the sort of thing you go home and tell your family.*

Kevin, (P, 21-24, low GCSE)

He clearly felt well supported within his 'learning' prison, almost part of a family. This was not unusual among the younger participants, many of whom had troubled backgrounds and it was seen earlier that Kevin lacked good family support (see 5.4.1).

Alan was only 14 when he was excluded from school and had hated education. Although this was his first prison sentence, he admitted that he had been in trouble a lot as he was growing up and he had not originally considered that distance learning was for him. He would not have made the commitment if it had not been for the prison education manager in a previous prison,

*W was a good jail... I was on the computing course [ECDL]... I got a lot of help from [education manager]. She offered me the teaching assistant job. She noticed I offered help to other students and put me forward for [access course] and I took it from there*

Alan (S, 21-24, None)

Alan had been encouraged to take a more responsible position as well as complete PHDL. Here again the teaching assistant role was synonymous with PHDL. Together

they provided the student with self-efficacy, with the confidence to learn autonomously and to succeed, but also to develop socially by imparting their knowledge to others. In a 'learning' prison this was part of the prison's organisational structure (see 5.3.3 above), in other prisons it relied on a particular member of staff to identify learning potential and point the learner in the right direction. It is unknown whether W could be described as a 'learning' prison or not but the participant clearly perceived it as a supportive prison.

There were many examples where staff of all kinds had provided the necessary support required for participants to overcome some of the structural barriers to learning. Some participants received support from other prison interventions. Jed, as a recovering drug addict, had found support from staff in a drug rehabilitation programme which he had started on a previous sentence. Last time he was released to 'rehab' and spoke fondly about that time.

*It was the best 6 months of my life – finding myself again. Everything was new to me. People wanted to be my friend for who I was, not for what I had in my pocket.*

Jed (F, 41-49, None)

However, recovering from addiction was not an easy process. He went back to live on his own too early and returned to drugs and crime. That was just before this latest 5 year sentence in which he started his distance learning. He was now ready to go back to 'rehab' but this time he knew he would need a lot of help. This highlighted his raised awareness which was[is?] considered to be a pre-requisite for transformative learning.



## **Charities**

Brian was also recovering from drug addiction. He was realistic. He had been through the system many times before and knew there would be difficulties when he was released so he intended accepting all the support that was on offer.

*[a charity] are still working with me. They'll see me every week and give me advice – meet up have a cup of coffee... [the prison staff] have a mentoring scheme. [the prison staff] will help with probation, housing etc. I'm going back to mum's for the duration of the licence.*

Brian, (P, 25-29, none)

There were many charities working in the prison which supported the participants to move towards transformative learning. This is discussed further in chapter 6 as most of these charities worked with participants after release.

## **Distance learning tutors**

Staff from distance learning providers were less obviously supportive as they were not usually present in the prison. However the support they offered could be invaluable in encouraging participants to overcome some of the barriers to learning and enabling transformative learning. Participants valued any form of contact with their distance learning tutors, even telephone tutorials, and positive feedback was very important. Some of those who failed to continue cited lack of tutor contact as one of the reasons for failure to complete. For example, when Eddie was asked what would have helped him to continue the course, he answered,

*Maybe a bit more interaction with someone [Distance learning coordinator] was away for a while [for medical reasons] and so there wasn't really anyone to go*

*and talk to. I read about telephone tutorials but I didn't have any. I didn't send the first assignment.*

Eddie, (P, 30-39, GCSE)

His comment suggests that his lack of support may have been a combination of events as the distance learning coordinator had also been missing. Eric explained how he needed tutor contact and was happy with a phone call but also how improvement in his assignments was important to him.

*Talking [to the tutor] on the phone - I really need that... I got my highest mark to date – got 80 out of 90 today – just heard. I'm improving – I never thought I could do it but the more I've done it the more I believe in myself.*

Eric (H, 25-29, GCSE+)

Ivan was not able to see or speak to his distance learning tutor but valued the positive feedback on his assignments,

*No [visits] all by post but I got very good feedback. Same tutor all the way through – that was important – it was good. Every time I got an assignment back it was very encouraging – I'd had a lot of self-esteem problems so that was good.*

Ivan (2yr, 30-39, HE)

Some participants especially liked the personal visits. Afram explained how one of his tutors had made a big difference to him.

*It was Exploring English Language, a proper tutorial. The tutor came 3 or 4 times [during the course], always on time, maintaining contact with me properly. That makes a lot of difference.*

Afram (M, 40-49, A-level+)

These quotes highlight the importance that participants placed on being treated as 'proper' students, having tutor contact and being given positive feedback which raised their self-esteem and confidence. Elliot, also appreciated the distance learning tutor visits but explained how that did not provide social learning,

*Lectures are conducted 1 on 1 which is good but obviously you then miss out on the interaction with other people where you can get perspectives that don't come out between 2 people, which is obviously very important, in any subject you need to assess all angles from everything*

Elliot (1yr, 40-49, A-Level)

Elliot was again stressing the need to be a proper student which could be enhanced by a learning community.

#### **5.4.3 Learning community**

As was seen in 5.3.2 some participants felt isolated from the distance learning community because they were not able to communicate with their tutor or other students. This did not always prevent them from feeling that they belonged to a learning community. Many found other means of belonging to a learning community. For example, Rees helped other students which enabled him to gain vital feedback for his own learning,

*There are students doing education at a lower level and they ask me and it's quite nice that it confirms to me that I've learnt correctly.*

Rees (P, 21-24, A-level)

As expected, many participants felt they needed to give something back to society and help others less fortunate. They enjoyed feeling needed and certain roles and

responsibilities were particularly good for promoting a sense of pride. Such roles included classroom or library assistants, a variety of different mentoring roles, or simply being able to learn, or have tutorials, in a group. These opportunities were important to them as they helped them to feel part of a community.

The peer mentoring role in this 'prison was a particularly good example of where participants were able to help others as well as develop themselves personally and socially by being part of a learning community. The prison employed prisoners to be peer-partners who were champions for different subject areas such as Business or Psychology. These jobs were officially advertised in the prison and the prisoner had to formally apply and pass the interview to be accepted. The peer mentoring scheme was excellent on many fronts and there are numerous examples throughout this thesis where these roles went hand in hand with PHDL. It provided valuable mentoring for the less able learners but also the mentors themselves gained hugely from their responsible role, providing them with self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-confidence, pride and a sense of belonging.

Brian was initially introduced to distance learning through the peer partner role.

*They offered me a peer-partner job. I then got interested in distance learning. They introduced me to the OU.*

Brian, (P, 25-29, none)

It has been seen that the role also enabled Brian to develop his pride and independence by becoming a link between staff and prisoners as well as helping him to develop his studies by giving him good access to resources for learning.

Tristan was getting satisfaction from the responsibility of using his skills to help others

*I got a peer partner job [in IT] ... It's quite fulfilling ... I help to organise the class, help students with folders and basically mentor them. The number of people who can't read in prison is ridiculous so I'm helping them with that and the computer. I'm really enjoying that.*

Tristan (P, 18-20, GCSE)

This 'learning' prison provided these roles for the participants. However, there were many examples of where participants in most prisons sought roles which could help them to support their peers. For example, they became listeners (a peer counsellor trained by the Samaritans to listen to prisoners who are in distress) or 'Toe-by-Toe' mentors (a mentoring scheme run by the Shannon Trust to help prisoners learn to read and write). Doug remembered how proud he was to do this.

*I think anything like that helps when you talk to each other, so I had something to offer them, to offer prisoners that were in the same boat, and it was nice because a lot of prisoners saw me as someone they could look up to. I used to help them write their letters and stuff.*

Doug (+10yrs, 40-49, None)

Susan had filled her days with such roles,

*I help out here [classroom assistant] twice a week. I'm also a library orderly and do Toe-by-Toe all the time. In Toe-by-Toe a whole world opens up for people.*

Susan (V, 51-60, A-level+)

These participants were doing whatever they could to be valuable, to feel needed and to give back to society but these responsible roles were also providing participants with self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Those who were able to feel part of a distance learning community, by meeting their tutor (as above) or getting additional

information about other students, were the lucky ones. A few participants were able to engage more fully with other students through exceptional circumstances, such as RoTL or by tutors providing extra feedback, and these provided particularly powerful feelings of belonging. Students valued any form of contact with the learning community outside of prison.

However, if they could not get that contact, sometimes they just imagined it. Andrew, for example, was able to cope by imagining he was in university,

*You can treat it like you're in university. In my mind - I go to the gym and I read. I never read fictional books but I read my economics books.*

Andrew (H-8m, 25-29, A-level)

He was partitioning himself off from other prisoners who were not students and mixing with different people.

*Those [criminal] conversations are not for me anymore, I speak to people who have already got a degree.*

Andrew (H-8m, 25-29, A-level)

Andrew explained, however, that the physical environment of prison made the concept of being a University student quite difficult at times,

*I don't feel like a student most of the time. Occasionally when I'm here [in the Virtual Campus/distance learning room] I do but then you're reminded very quickly on the wing that you're in prison!*

Andrew (H-2m, 25-29, A level)

Clearly, the independent learning session was again a positive learning environment which enabled Andrew to feel part of a community but that time was short and the rest of the time he had to rely on his imagination.

Sheena had done many PHDL courses in prison and was well on the way towards her degree in Social Care. She enjoyed belonging to a student community. She had found the distance learning provider's newsletters for prisoners gave her the confidence to continue,

*I used to get the Open University newsletter – I liked that and how you could see how people got through their courses. It makes you know that you can do it too.*

Sheena, (V, 30-39, GCSE)

Sadly these newsletters were no longer being produced but these quotes do highlight how any contact with distance learning tutors and other students was found to be invaluable by these isolated learners.

The social factors which have been discussed in this section were perceived to have made the difference to these participants. Being treated as a student, being valued, being supported by individuals who cared and belonging to a learning community had all helped them to develop their confidence, their self-esteem, their pride and their social identity. The following section highlights how these social support factors affected their personal identity and their hopes and aspirations for future prospects upon release.

## **5.5 Psychological outcomes: change through PHDL**

This section highlights the third theme to emerge from the analysis: psychological outcomes. These outcomes were relevant to what participants perceived they had gained from their study, how they had personally dealt with the challenges to study, what had helped them to develop their learning and study skills and how their motivations had changed as they continued their journey. In this way it was possible to

identify how the structures and social support factors discussed above had encouraged personal change.

#### 5.5.1 Self-awareness and identity

Many participants found their studies had helped them to be more aware of their failings. For example, Alan had been in the criminal justice system most of his life and perceived that PHDL had enabled him to mature and see things differently.

*It [PHDL]'s helped me to make the changes in my life. Education is definitely making it happen ... I've grown up a bit. I stop and think about the consequences of things now before I do them*

Alan (S, 21-24, None)

This quote suggests that Alan's learning had helped him to mature and also to reflect on his behaviour. Rees also perceived himself to be more mature. Success in his psychology course had helped him to see things differently,

*It [PHDL]'s made the difference. I've grown as a person since I've been in here*

Rees (P, 21-24, A-level)

Other participants were developing a student identity, becoming part of a wider community of learners which helped them to replace their prisoner identity. This next quote from Andrew clearly shows that he was developing a new identity, a student identity.

*It's opening up my eyes to a lot of things. It's changing me as a person. It's giving me the way out. My interests are different. I don't necessarily entertain certain conversations as I'm not in that frame of mind.*

Andrew (H, 25-29, A level)



He now considers himself part of a different group of people who are educated. He is looking at things from a different perspective, from a different 'frame of reference'. Jed was also starting to look at things differently. His comment above (in 5.4.2) highlighted how much he wanted to stay away from drugs. The following quotes also show that he perceived that his learning journey was changing him,

*I used to go to the class and think "They're special". When I was doing a Diploma I saw the Open University as special and I wanted to join them.*

Jed (F, 40-49, None)

He had looked upon the university as something to aspire to, but now he was becoming a university student and that had helped him to move away from his prisoner identity,

*I sort of disassociate myself with prison. I don't run with the crowd. I chat to people. I'm polite but I don't really mix. I'm like at a crossroads. I've got one foot in and one foot out of my previous life.*

Jed (F, 40-49, None)

Although he was clearly beginning to change who he was, he did not yet perceive himself as a student so perhaps his student identity was not yet fully formed. Jafaar was also only just beginning to develop a student identity.

*Education has made me feel as if I can learn. It's not as hard as I first thought it was. I used to look at university and think 'no I haven't got the brains for that' but now I see I can. So now I've got the confidence to do it when I get out.*

Jafaar (F, 30-39, A-level)

He had developed sufficient confidence to see that he could study at this level and that he could continue learning when he was released. Tristan was also developing a new identity in various ways through his activities.

*It [prison]'s made me uncertain about my future. But that's created a good – a need to find some stability and I've done that through education. At the end I'll have come out of here with a different outlook. My whole persona's changed I like to think.*

Tristan (P, 18-20, GCSE)

However it was his next comment which really showed what his sociology course had done for him,

*I've done a lot of thinking. What is the correct way to behave? We create our own norms. How should I be acting? ... We have a role to play in society. We have to sacrifice some things ... What I've got from education is the ability to have these thoughts. It's developed my motivation and allowed me to have these thoughts and to change my whole behaviour and attitude.*

Tristan (P, 18-20, GCSE)

Tristan had clearly developed through his learning. He had become far more aware of who he was and his position in society. These quotes highlight how participants, through studying PHDL, had begun to reflect on their situation, to become more aware of themselves and others and had begun to develop a student identity which had enabled them to rise above their prisoner status. They seemed able to see more, to see beyond the confines of their previous world. They had new horizons and potentially a brighter future. This suggests that PHDL may have been transformative by building a positive personal and social identity which may help them to overcome the barriers which were to come upon release.

### 5.5.2 Developing resilience

The structural barriers to studying PHDL were outlined in 5.3 above and the social factors which helped some participants to overcome those barriers were outlined in 5.4. However there were other factors needed to achieve this. Some participants found confidence, focus or determination which they needed to help them to overcome the many barriers to studying in prison, to help them to continue their learning journey and to fulfil their aspirations. They therefore appeared to be developing an inner strength, or resilience, which it will be seen in chapter 6, helped them to overcome further barriers after release.

Despite the social support factors (in 5.4), some participants like Eddie, found the barriers to PHDL too difficult and were unable to continue their studies. Eddie was on his eighth sentence and found the whole distance learning process too stressful. It required him to study in his cell but he explained that did not work.

*I don't do anything in my cell cos that's my relaxing place. It's my haven ...  
boxing things helps you get through. My cell is the space for my music*

Eddie, (P, 30-39, GCSE)

He perceived that he had not received adequate support for his studies and he was not able to rise above the structural constraints within the prison. Unable to find the space or time to study, he quickly abandoned the course. Although Eddie had been unable to find the space or the resilience to complete his studies, there were many others who did find new strengths with which to overcome the barriers in order to continue with their studies.

Issues regarding lack of access to information, communication and technology in prison were highlighted in 5.3.2. However, participants were developing greater

determination to overcome these barriers. They found a variety of different methods for doing that. For example, Sheena was able to use the library,

*I put my foot down to use the library for 1 hour to use the computers. That was good because I could do the study. It was good because more quiet time – people were more mature and officers scrubbed out anti-social behaviour.*

Sheena, (V, 30-39, GCSE)

This comment emphasised the determination which Sheena had shown and a sign that she was developing more resilience by having to fight for the learning resources she needed. Nina, too, had felt isolated in her studies (see 5.3.2) but this isolation had actually helped her to develop into an autonomous learner and so, even though she had been to University previously, PHDL had been transformative as the following quote highlights,

*But I have learnt self-reliance quite a lot because when you're here you can't email your tutor and it's difficult... Prison don't support you at all. You have to be determined and self-motivated otherwise you'd just end up failing...*

Nina, (V, 21-24, A-level+)

Clearly, the positive effects of having to be self-reliant, in order to study, were helping Nina to develop greater confidence and determination which led to her resilience. She also perceived the benefits of not having distraction, such as television, mobile phone and the Internet, enabled her to focus which aided further her transformation.

*It [PHDL] focused me. This assignment, this book, I set myself a timetable.*

*My own space, locked in and I actually believe I can achieve whatever I put my mind to.*

Nina, (V, 21-24, A-level+)

Nina's comment shows that not only had she developed focus through her adversity but she had also been empowered by her learning. Many of the participants felt empowered in this way, mostly through overcoming the barriers to learning but some were purely empowered by the knowledge they had gained. For example, Brian had no previous qualifications and had found his distance learning course challenging but he was empowered by the knowledge that he really could study at this level,

*I didn't think I was capable especially essays and stuff and it was a bit heavy but it was good... It opened doors and made me realise I can study at this level.*

Brian, (P, 25-29, none)

He was developing greater self-confidence. He was learning a lot about himself and business and he felt that this was going to make a lot of difference to him.

*There's no down side to distance learning in prison. This is the best department I've seen – lots of scope, whatever you want to do. I've got qualifications now. I've learnt a lot about being self-employed. It's set me up, really, for the future.*

Brian, (P, 25-29, none)

In this quote he showed how he had changed his perception of business. This quote, once again highlighted the support from his 'learning' prison.

Ernie, who was fostered at 14, said a lot about his studies but this little quote highlighted the confidence he had developed through his PHDL.

*OU has helped me think differently. It's given me the edge. It's given me the end game ... When I was little I was with a charity – someone wanted me to give a speech. I said I didn't want to do that – I would now.*

Ernie (H, 25-29, Low GCSE)

Eric, was studying business. He was onto his second module and was developing his self-confidence. He wanted more of the calmness that he perceived PHDL had to offer,

*I've seen what it can do. People who do this are calmer. I want that... It's like eating a cookie, you've like tasted it and you want more. I've done some Business Education and now I want more*

Eric (H, 25-29, GCSE+)

The calming influence of PHDL was perceived by others too. Chandresh had a lot of previous convictions but had only started to study on this sentence and had recently found an inner peace from his reading,

*This sentence I've changed. I've read so much about psychology – laws of power, attraction. I've learnt how to calm down and relax. I've found an inner peace in this sentence I think.*

Chandresh (S, 25-29, GCSE+)

Chandresh had clearly been empowered by his learning and changed through his PHDL. Tristan was also empowered by his progress and wanted to continue when he was released. He was the youngest participant and had needed to develop the skills of independent learning very quickly.

*Distance Learning is really helpful but you really have to have dedication and motivation. You need to develop skills very, very quickly, knowing how to study and extract relevant ideas from the text.... I will need it for later learning.*

Tristan (P, 18-20, GCSE)

This quote shows Tristan's determination to overcome the barriers to study but also that he was determined to continue with his studies. He planned to go to college to take his A-levels and also to take a distance learning course as he had hoped to go to university, eventually, to study law. He knew that his parents would prefer him to get a trade and earn some money. He was concerned that as a student he would be a burden to them but he was still very determined just 4 days before his release,

*I want this education and I'm going to get it and I can't see anything stopping me ... I've given up smoking to buy a bus pass and clothe myself.*

Tristan (P, 18-20, GCSE)

Ernie was empowered by his achievement. His aspiration was to keep studying and hopefully develop his own business and hoped that he had done enough.

*Just the fact that you've achieved something, I'd never achieved anything like that [PHDL course]. Because I dropped out of school and everything, it just makes you feel different.*

Ernie, (H, 25-29, GCSE+)

These participants perceived themselves to be more confident, determined, focused and empowered by their learning. They were therefore developing a resilience which would help them to overcome the barriers which were yet to come. However, that did not prevent them worrying about their future after release.

### 5.5.3 Pre-release anxiety

Pre-release anxieties were an important factor which could prevent participants from concentrating on their studies. They were caused mostly by lack of information about their release conditions or how they could continue with their studies.

Ernie had been in and out of prison several times previously and was aware of potential difficulties upon release. He knew he needed to prepare well and was hopeful that if he was able to continue studying then his studies could make the difference.

*If there's no structure there [after release] then it won't work. You've given us a structure to live by [in prison] ... If you give us a structure and show people we can do it then more criminals will want to change ... OU is the structure to keep you motivated and give you prospects of a better world – be a better person, a better man. That dream you had when you were a kid. You can have it.*

Ernie (H, 25-29, Low GCSE)

This quote indicates the hope that Ernie had developed through his PHDL and the aspirations for a better life. However, as he approached his release date he was concerned about how he would continue with his studies,

*Personally I'm not sure I'm going to be able to continue studying ... It [PHDL]'s not going to help us get a job straight away and there's no information about how we fund ourselves.*

Ernie (H, 25-29, Low GCSE)

Andrew too had been through the prison system several times before and he was very concerned about his forthcoming release. He also knew that there would be a lack of structure on release.



*The hardest thing is going home – getting used to a normal environment. This is why the study is so important. It's hard to look for a job when you first come out of prison. You need something to use your time and put you in the right frame of mind.*

Andrew (H, 25-29, A-level)

He had started education on this sentence and was hopeful that continued study after release would make the difference this time, but he had not been given sufficient information about how to do that.

*Starting the OU has given me hope and a fresh start with other aspects of life. But I'm not sure how to go down that road.*

Andrew (H, 25-29, A-level)

Andrew's perception of the importance of study gave him a focus, a structure by which to cope with life but also highlighted once again, the lack of information he needed to continue his studies on release.

For those who were going into a hostel for security reasons or were without family support, there was anxiety about accommodation.

*My main gripe is I'm doing this [PHDL] but it makes no odds. I haven't got a base – nowhere to live so I can't implement any of what I've learned until I have a place to live. Miss, I'm nearly 40. I'm just writing a letter to the council right now. A single male with no family – I'm not a priority.*

Trevor (H, 30-39, None)

Often the worry of not knowing where they were going had a detrimental effect on their studies. Jed was particularly worried about accommodation. He knew he needed help

to stay off drugs and wanted to go to a hostel but he also knew that these varied in quality,

*... no ideas about accommodation, that's the biggest worry ... there's good and bad hostels and I need a good safe place.*

Jed, (F, 40-49,  
None)

However, it can be seen below that Jed had high hope that this time his PHDL had made the difference and he would achieve his aspiration of becoming a drug counsellor.

#### **5.5.4 Hopes and Aspirations**

Some of the aspirations which the participants had voiced have already been discussed in earlier sections of this chapter. This section highlights further how the hopes and aspirations were dependent on the resilience which participants had developed through their learning and hence was also dependent on the structural and social support factors in the previous sections.

Many participants wanted to continue studying. In particular, almost all the participants from P, the good practice, 'learning' prison wanted to continue their studies. For example, Malcolm was a traveller and had applied for agricultural college. He hoped to become a farrier and work with his family's horses.

*I'm going to college now to train to be a horse farrier – a blacksmith. We've applied for college [name of college] - they've got places, they know about prison. I needed qualifications but I've done enough.*

Malcolm, (P, 21-24, None)

Brian was also looking forward to continuing his property development course and wanted to do the research he could not do in prison.

*I'm now doing A-level UK Property development which I'll continue on the out. It's a good course but there's a lot of research. I'm limited in what I can do. [Prison's distance learning coordinator] has been online for me but when I get out I can go to the library and spend all day doing it.*

Brian, (P, 25-29, None)

The “we” in Malcolm’s comment, and the optimism in Brian’s comment, highlights the collaborative, supportive environment of the distance learning department where they had completed their PHDL. There was clearly a commitment to learning from them both with much hope that their studies would make a difference and perhaps overcome the potential barriers to continuing their education after release.

Kevin also wanted to continue his studies. He had done a counselling course and was registered for a psychology course, starting just after his release. He hoped to become a drug counsellor for young people in care.

*I've been through the care system, alcohol and the prison system. My head's screwed on now [through PHDL] and I know what these people want. I want to help people ... I want to do something that will make a difference.*

Kevin (P, 21-24, Low GCSE)

As pointed out in 5.4.3 (above) the need to help others was a strong desire for many participants and this had been followed through into Kevin’s aspiration for the future. This quote highlights Kevin’s belief that PHDL had given him what he needed to be able to integrate back into society on his release and help others. The supportive

environment in the prison had helped to provide him with the hope to go out and fulfil his aspirations. However, he was young and inexperienced. Jed was also a recovering drug-addict who had aspirations to be a drug counsellor eventually. However, he had much more experience of the criminal justice system than Kevin and he knew from that past experience that staying away from drugs would be very difficult. It was seen in 5.5.3 (above) that Jed had worries about finding a safe place to live on his release but he had found new hope in his studies on this sentence and his response to my question about whether his studies had transformed him needs no further comment.

*Education is transformational because it gives you hope which is all that I ask for.*

Jed, (F, 40-49, None)

What was particularly noticeable about these participants' aspirations, were their low pre-prison qualifications. Their aspirations indicated that their learning journeys in prison had raised their expectations. Some participants had completed all their secondary education in prison and had gradually progressed to the higher-level learning which had been transformative.

Estha did gain some GCSEs at school but the distance she had travelled in her learning journey was also clear from her comment below.

*If I wasn't the sort of person that I am I wouldn't have pushed as much as I have and got as much as I have but if I hadn't had the initial advice from the education manager in St [prison] I wouldn't have ever looked at the OU. I never ever had in my brain ever that I was going to do a degree.*

Estha (V, 25-29, GCSE+)

Estha's determination had clearly helped her to overcome the barriers to study but she had also needed additional support, which in her case was the person who had encouraged her to take a university course in the first place.

Dennis also remembered the person who had set him on his learning journey which ended with him gaining a degree and a very different life.

*Unfortunately I can't remember this woman's name, but she made it quite plain and she was a godsend. She said "you won't know it, but there will come a point where you look back and you won't recognise the person that you were, and it will be because you've persevered and you've learnt through education. I wish you well" and then she signed the entry fee to the OU. And that was my first one.*

Dennis, (+10yrs, 40-49, Low GCSE)

He went on to say how "doing education" within the structure of the prison system, not only mediated the effects of that structure but also made him more resilient.

*I definitely think education helped, I'm a totally different person to who I was 20 odd years ago and I believe the education is the reason. Prison definitely moulds you and brings out both the positives and the negatives, but running or doing that in conjunction with education - it's the education that made me the educational fighter that I am now.*

Dennis, (+10yrs, 40-49, Low GCSE)

Here Dennis clearly states what had been suggested by the analysis of the pre-release interviews in this chapter; that his PHDL was transformative because climbing the barriers in order to learn in prison had given him the resilience to keep fighting and change his life on release.

## 5.6 Chapter conclusions

This chapter has presented the findings from analysis of the data collected from the participants in prison before release in order to answer the first research question. Three main themes emerged from the analysis: structural factors, social support factors and psychological outcomes. Prisons were found to vary widely in their support for PHDL and the factors varied accordingly.

The physical, infrastructural and organisational structural factors were perceived as barriers to learning in most prisons and only in a 'learning' prison, which encouraged PHDL, did the structures appear more enabling. The social support factors were perceived to mediate those structural barriers and support the learners to succeed. The support network consisted of family and friends, peers in learning communities, as well as individuals within the stakeholder organisations. The psychological outcomes were the participants' beliefs and values which had developed through their learning. Obviously each participant came with their own values when they entered prison but participants perceived these to have changed through their learning and through exposure to the different structural and social support factors. These psychological outcomes were self-awareness and identity, developing resilience, pre-release anxiety and hopes and aspiration.

The reasons for starting PHDL were complex. Time is a commodity in prison and prisoners felt the need to use that time well. Distance learning was something which enabled them to use their time constructively but their reasons for doing so, varied according to their perception of learning. Some were drawn to PHDL for prison-related reasons, because it was convenient and was an alternative activity which avoided thinking about being in prison. Some were participating in PHDL for employment-focused reasons and desired qualifications to help them gain employment on release. Others had started PHDL for personal development and wanted to change who they

were either because they had been shocked into it or because they had just reached a time in their life when they wanted to change. Choice was important but it was not a simple process. Many, who had lacked the confidence to take their first steps on the higher education ladder, had been encouraged by others to do so. Hence, it was seen that reasons for starting PHDL were affected by the prison's structural and social support factors.

The structural factors within the prison, which mostly presented barriers to PHDL, included the controlling factors which were often out of the control of the participant and even out of control of many of the organisational staff. These were the physical prison structures such as the physical effects of the prison regime and space for learning; the infrastructure which included information, communication and technology for learning; and the organisational structures which included whether the different organisations worked together or not. There was a general perception by participants that prison did provide food and accommodation and therefore a physical structure within which to live, although the negative effect of that structure was to reduce prisoners' free choice and to encourage them to become dependent on the system. The physical structures for learning varied across prisons and in a 'learning' prison, they provided specific space and time for independent study but in a 'working' prison, finding suitable space and time for learning was very difficult.

The infrastructure included a lack of assessment and guidance for learning at induction, a lack of guidance and resources for learning during the learning journey, and a lack of information for learners on release. There was insufficient information on the options available, with little opportunity to consider those options. There was insufficient guidance for possible learning routes towards integration on release. For example, the Open University provided a dedicated prospectus for learning but this was not adequately available or explained. As Ernie's comments in 5.3.2 suggest, if

prisoners were given the right information in those early weeks in prison then more may want to change, and there could be larger numbers studying.

Resources for learning varied but because many participants worked all day, they were unable to access sufficient resources to type up their assignments. The infrastructure of a 'learning' prison, although still lacking the Internet so desperately needed for distance learning, enabled computing technology and other resources to be made available for distance learners outside working hours (see 5.3.2). This helped participants to succeed in their learning and provided even more self-esteem. In addition, where the responsible peer support roles were encouraged, there was increased discipline-specific support and a greater sense of belonging to a learning community with all the associated benefits.

Most participants lacked information about their forthcoming release and that was a cause of anxiety which affected their learning. Some did not know where they were going to live, that included what geographical area, what type of accommodation and what type of restrictions on their license. Often, they also did not know their offender manager. In particular, for their learning, they did not know how to continue studying when they were released. They lacked information about how to contact their distance learning provider or what they would need to do to ensure continuity of learning.

The organisational structure of most prisons was fragmented and uncoordinated which resulted in confused priorities for learning and ultimately a low priority given to PHDL. The exception was again, a 'learning' prison which in the best case was also a private prison, so all the staff worked for the same organisation which was learner-focused. Some of these structural barriers to learning were specific to a prison context, whereas others were similar to those which any distance learning student may encounter. The point here was that in a prison context, these problems were accentuated and students needed a greater determination to overcome them. In particular it was shown how the



prison culture could vary and so in a 'learning' prison the factors such as physical space and infrastructure were organised to support transformative learning but in a 'working' prison they led to barriers to study.

The social support factors were those factors which participants perceived supported their learning in prison. These factors included the importance of family, key support people within the stakeholder organisations as well as support through peers and belonging to learning communities. Family could provide material support but more importantly, they often provided motivational support. However, friends did not figure very significantly in the prison environment. Once again, differences between prisons were highlighted and 'learning' prisons had a more supportive environment which encouraged learning communities where learners could take responsibility for their learning, help others and develop a positive identity. In such prisons, the individuals who were seen to be important supporters of learning, worked with the system. However, in the less supportive prisons and especially the 'working' prisons, those individuals had to fight the system to support PHDL.

The resultant psychological outcomes suggested that PHDL had led to personal change in many of those participants who had engaged with their learning. Participants perceived that PHDL had influenced their maturation. They had developed through their learning and found new meaning in their lives. The perceived benefits of the learning process were: the ability to reflect with increased self-awareness; a desire to help others who were less fortunate; development and maintenance of a student identity which developed further their self-confidence and determination to reach for their goals. Hence they were developing resilience through their learning and through overcoming the structural barriers. They could see beyond the confines of their closed world and developed realistic hopes and aspirations for a brighter future after release. The amount of study, and the level to which the participant had risen, appeared to

reduce fears and raise hopes. Most of those who had engaged with their learning had strong, realistic, aspirations and perceived their PHDL to have had a significant effect on these. Many participants had plans to continue studying and some had plans to go to university or college on release. However, they identified some of the barriers to resettlement and had anxieties about their forthcoming release. Those students who had not engaged with their study had very few realistic aspirations, sometimes none at all.

This chapter has highlighted the main factors which affect the transformative potential of PHDL. It has shown how the social support factors of family, friends, individual organisations and the learning community mediate the physical, infrastructural and organisation structural barriers. When these factors interacted positively, there was a perceived personal change in the learner which led to the potential for transformative learning. This involved increased self-awareness and a positive student identity, resilience from overcoming the barriers and high hopes with realistic aspirations for the future. However, when the participants lacked support or the resilience to overcome the structural barriers to study in prison, the results were negativity, course abandonment, failure and disappointment. The most important enablers for transformative learning were dedicated space for independent learning, a learning community, and responsible positions which nurtured self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy.

The three main barriers to transformative learning were insufficient readiness for independent learning, inadequate resources for learning and insufficient information for release. The prison context was found to be very important and 'working' prisons resulted in more negative findings whereas a 'learning' prison provided good practice. A model of these findings is developed in chapter 7 where they are related to the literature and provide implications for policy and practice. The next chapter presents the analysis of post-release interviews and shows whether PHDL, and the personal

change it encouraged, was perceived to prepare participants adequately for life after release and whether their hopes and aspirations were fulfilled.



## **Chapter 6: Post-release findings: Life after prison**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the thematic analysis of the post-release interviews and thus participants' perceptions of the role of Prison-based Higher-level Distance Learning (PHDL) in their lives after release. The factors which participants identified as important in their life after prison, naturally build on the factors which affected them in their prison learning journey. This post-release analysis therefore follows the same three themes of structural, social support and psychological from the in-prison analysis (in chapter 5) which aimed to answer the first research question.

#### **1. In what ways is PHDL transformative?**

- In what ways can it lead to personal change in the learner?
- How does that change relate to hopes and aspirations for future prospects and life chances?

This chapter investigates whether that personal change and those hopes and aspirations were maintained upon release and how well they had prepared the participants for life after prison. It therefore aims to answer the second research question.

#### **2. What role does PHDL play in the learners' life after prison?**

- How does it equip learners with the personal and social qualities required to manage life after prison?
- How does it relate to their integration into society?

In view of the longitudinal nature of the research, the findings in this chapter are presented in two stages. Analysis of the immediate, post-release interviews (and relevant parts of pilot interviews) is presented in 6.2. The results immediately post-release appeared rather bleak with many new barriers to face and many of the participants perceived significant hardship during that time. Analysis of later interviews (and much of the pilot interviews), when participants had been released for longer, is presented in 6.3. Participants were, in some circumstances, beginning to find their feet and were able to identify the role that PHDL had played in their journey back to society.

Section 6.4 concludes the chapter by highlighting the factors which led to a more stable life after prison, including the factors which helped or hindered the participants' personal and social integration. The findings suggest that the resilience which participants had developed in prison appeared to help them to face the huge problems which awaited them upon release. Those participants who were perceived to have experienced (at least partially) transformative learning, and particularly those who continued studying, did indeed appear to have improved chances of successful integration into society.

Appendix F1 provides the pilot participant characteristics and F3 provides the main longitudinal participant characteristics. These highlight that the majority of the traced participants who did not engage with their learning were recalled to prison, suggesting that perhaps they had not developed the necessary qualities to sufficiently deal with the immense barriers after release.

## **6.2 Immediate post-release findings: Many more hills to climb**

This section provides the thematic analysis of the immediate post-release interview data (including any relevant material from the pilot interviews). The findings have been arranged under the three key themes of structural factors, social support factors and

psychological outcomes to show how participants' perceptions have changed over time.

### **6.2.1 Structural factors**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the prisons' physical, infrastructural and organisational structures had a mostly negative effect on their learning but prison did provide them with a structure by which to live. On release, the participants perceived very little structure and that was detrimental to their learning.

*When I was in prison everything was very well structured. I had specific distance learning sessions I could go to ... when I was released obviously I lost that structure. And I've just not found it possible to continue studying .... I'm in a hostel. I don't have a computer to work on and I don't have anywhere to go and sit ... there's too much going on in such a short time to concentrate on studying.*

Ivan, Pilot+ 1yr

Ivan here emphasises the structure-less, chaotic existence which was common to most participants in the first few months after release.

#### **6.2.1.1 Physical structure**

Prison had provided a physical structure in which the participants lived and learned. The strict prison regime, although repetitive, had provided food, accommodation and employment. In contrast, post-release accommodation was mostly unstable and inappropriate for learning and there were immense structural barriers to employment and continued learning.

## *Accommodation*

For the many participants who were unable to return to a stable family home after release, finding suitable accommodation was a fundamental problem. Many of their pre-release anxieties had been well-founded. Depending on license conditions, some participants, like Ivan above, were released to a hostel which restricted movement and provided behavioural courses or addiction support. These were perceived to vary in quality and were mostly perceived to be unsuitable learning environments.

Susan found the hostel to be good in comparison to the prison but very restrictive,

*I understand and I'm grateful to have a roof over my head and everything and the place itself is lovely... I've got a nice room and I have all my toiletries and my food and it's not a problem at all. I just want to be out doing something.*

Susan, M+1m

She had achieved distinctions for her last two PHDL courses and was registered for another course. However, with the strict license conditions which involved signing on twice a day, she abandoned her PHDL course. She remained relatively positive under the circumstances but admitted that she did not enjoy the low-level courses provided in the hostel every morning,

*... we have to do these groups ...this week its self-esteem and then another week its alcohol addiction which doesn't concern me at all but you know ... I hate every second of them. Everybody does. We're always trying to get out of them. I was sort of hoping I'd have a voluntary job every day so I wouldn't have to go but it doesn't look like that's going to work.*

Susan, V+1m



Those courses were a far cry from Susan's higher education in prison, did not appear to help her self-esteem or particularly help her to re-integrate. Other participants, and especially those who were long-term, found their hostels were not the safe places they were supposed to be. Jed's main pre-release concern (see 5.5.3) was to have "a good safe place" where he could be helped to stay off drugs. His long term aspiration, and what his distance learning course led him towards, was to be a drug counsellor but he knew that he would need a lot of help before then. He did go to his preferred hostel but it was not all that he had hoped for and he was worried that although he was getting some help for his heroin addiction, he was consuming too much alcohol.

*Well the one [hostel] I'm living in at the moment, you're allowed to drink yeah? Well I don't have a problem with drink but I've drunk more in the last couple of months than I ever have in my life because I've never been a drinker. So that's a bit bad.*

Jed, F+2m

These fundamental worries about personal health and safety reduced the potential for personal development. Kevin also found his hostel conditions unhealthy as he had been very active in prison,

*I had to sign on every hour and town was a 20 minute walk so I had to get the job centre to ring them if I was going there. ... I asked for voluntary work but was told I couldn't do it. ... the heating's on all day and they'd rather leave you in bed than get you up for something.*

Kevin, +6m, recalled

Apart from being unhealthy, these conditions may also be unhelpful for learning. In prison Kevin had felt safe. He was a recovering drug addict and had aspirations to become a drug counsellor. He really wanted to concentrate on his studies. He had

been waiting for his distance learning materials for his next course but they had not arrived and he thought they may have been returned to the distance learning provider, unopened, by the hostel manager. This was later confirmed to be the case, by the distance learning provider and may have been a contributory factor in his recall to prison (see 6.2.2).

Some participants went home to live with their family but this was not always successful. For example, Brian had originally planned to live with his mum but that did not work out and he lacked stable accommodation for some time. He was half way through his property maintenance A-level but that was not now his priority. As a recovering drug-addict he was worried about who he mixed with.

*... there's a flat where I can sleep on a sofa but I don't want to stay there,  
you know, its trouble.*

Brian, P+4m

Shortly after this, Brian's mentor (see 6.2.2 below) helped him to find a flat in a good hostel but that came at a price. It was so expensive that Brian had to go onto benefits to pay for it, which meant he had to give up his work. Brian's aspiration was to develop a property maintenance business and in prison had felt confident about doing that (see 5.5.2). He still had an old van with some tools which had been provided by the Prince's Trust previously. He had had a few problems when the van broke down but he was still trying to make a go of the business. The mentor explained the 'accommodation trap',

*The biggest problem is the accommodation – the lads get a place of work  
but can't get anywhere to live or are told they are not allowed to be in that  
place so they can't get the job.*

Brian's mentor, +5m

Rees had a similar problem. He had been fully employed [as a salesman] before he went to prison and his ex-employer said his job was going to be there as long as he needed it. So Rees had started working there soon after release but the rent was so high on his bed and breakfast accommodation that he also had to give up his job and go on benefits.

*Housing told me I had to stop [work]... or they'd have to start charging me the rent of £55 per night for the B&B. Obviously that's not financially viable so I had to stop working for them and I went back to the Job Centre to claim benefit. They set me up with a work program ... they've got me working ... 5 days a week, completely free ... And as it's through the Job Centre as well it's not something I can say no to, because then they'd stop my benefit.*

Rees, P+3m

This last quote highlighted the unhelpful structures and the power of the 'system' over these ex-prisoners. Also the bed and breakfast accommodation, which was 10 miles from his family home, did not allow any form of cooking and his diet was very poor so once again accommodation was affecting health. Rees was half way through his psychology course with aspirations to study sport psychology and open his own gym one day. The bed and breakfast conditions were perhaps not ideal for anyone wanting to study but they also affected employment and therefore income. Both Brian and Rees were on waiting lists for flats which they could afford to pay on a working wage but they had been told that it could be another 6 months at least before they were likely to get one, and they were frustrated by the delays.

*I'm in the same situation now as I was the first day I come out [laughs] and I've been out 2 months now. It feels like an absolute waste of time because there's so much I could have done by now. It's ridiculous.*

These sorts of problems not only prevented them from concentrating on their studies but seriously reduced their potential for social integration into society.

*Space and time for learning*

Brian and Rees (above) were unable to work because of their accommodation problems but unlike in prison, they were not able to give their full attention to learning either. In the first few weeks and months after release, many participants could not cope with their studies as well as all their other more pressing activities and they either did not complete their studies or failed the course. The quote below from Brian was typical.

*I was doing that A level but I haven't got the time that I had in there. I had 100% of my time for study. But when I got out, like, there was so much going on... you know, it's difficult to try and do everything and put time aside*

Brian, P+7m

Here Brian was suggesting that time was a critical factor. In prison he was able to give distance learning his full attention but since leaving prison he had not been able to do that. The important point here is that he was able to reflect on the situation and therefore there was potential for him to return to study when time allowed. Which is, in fact, what eventually happened.

For most participants, the key issue was finding employment. They knew that might be difficult but their PHDL had given them hope, a new outlook on life, a new confidence which made them more optimistic. However, the reality was often far worse than they had anticipated. Doug explained the frustration,

*I got qualified as a fitness instructor and thought I'd try this, maybe I can work as this, but you get the CRB [Criminal records Bureau] check straight away, and I got qualified to teach as well, not allowed to do that either, everywhere I looked I was getting CRB'd left right and centre. And there was no way of getting round it, what I'd achieved wasn't enough for people to accept that I'd moved on.*

Doug, pilot+10yrs

These barriers led participants to lower their expectations and take more menial jobs. Alan got a job in a recycling plant which was clearly not the job his PHDL had prepared him for, but even that was not without problems.

*I told them I'd been to prison – I was honest with them right from the start. But they thought I was overqualified for that job. But I told them that my plans were to go to university and stuff. But they said that it wasn't worth their while training me up if I was going to leave ... I talked my way round it like and I got the job.*

Alan, S+10m-recalled

Alan's comment highlights how qualifications do not always provide employment opportunities but the cognitive and possibly social development may have helped Alan win the job. Malcolm did manage to get suitable employment. He started working for a company which allowed him to take an apprenticeship.

*Really this is a good job and I can take an electricians apprenticeship with it. So I'll do maybe 3-6 months general work for them and if I am interested in that work – and if I am I can take the apprenticeship then. ... It's 2 days a week in college and then 3 days a week work.*

Malcolm, P+2m

However, this was not what he had envisaged as he had aspirations of becoming a farrier and had applied to Agricultural College (see 5.5.4) but unfortunately that had not worked out. He suspected that he had not been accepted because of his prisoner status.

*I applied for a Farrier course but there were complications with it. First they said yes, then they said I needed work experience but a lot of people think that's because I applied from the prison, they think it was to do with that. They [college] can't say no because of that but people seem to think that was one of the reasons.*

Malcolm, P+2m

Malcolm was just one of many participants who had been inspired by their PHDL and had aspirations to continue learning upon release. Tristan, the youngest participant, had planned to go to college to take his A-levels and also to take a distance learning course as he had hoped to eventually go to university to study law. Unfortunately, he did not receive funding for his distance learning course as he applied 'when the pot was empty'. His college course had not materialised either as there had been complications and financial constraints.

*I was going to go for it [college] but they messed me around on that day and I waited for about an hour and they said we'll have to re-organise an interview. There was that and then there were the economic issues. Really it's forced me to take a job really.*

Tristan, P+1m

This quote may have hidden some of the anguish which Tristan had been through, as in prison he had said that he knew that his parents were struggling financially and

needed him to work but at that time he had been determined he was going to go to college, even giving up smoking to buy a bus pass (see 5.5.2 above). However, with his aspirations unfulfilled, Tristan had taken a job with Tesco's and was just pleased to be earning.

*It's not minimum wage, its ok. I work Friday night, Saturday and Sunday and it's a regular job. I was glad to get one to be honest.*

Tristan, P+1m

For the others, the uphill struggle to organise their employment or continued learning required time, patience and various methods of communication which needed infrastructure.

#### **6.2.1.2 Infrastructure**

In prison, participants had often lacked the information, communication and resources they needed to study. In the first few weeks and months after release, lack of information, communication and resources were also serious problems for most participants. In particular, as Andrew had explained in section 5.3.2, there was a lack of information about what participants should do about continuing their studies when released. Andrew had received the information he needed (from the researcher) and he did continue his studies but lack of information about how to continue studying was one of the main contributing factors to why many participants failed to continue their distance learning. There was also a serious lack of access to technology for information and communication. In this technological age, access and use of technology is a pre-requisite for normal life. Most organisations (including the universities) assumed that people had easy access to a telephone, email and online information, so there were severe problems with communication at times for these newly-released prisoners who lacked the basic technology to function properly.

### *Communication and resources for living and learning*

Some, especially the younger participants, had had computers before going into prison but these rarely worked after being unused for so long. Lack of electronic communication made getting life back on track so much more difficult. In chapter 5, it was seen that the one thing which had kept Nina motivated while in prison, was the thought of returning for her final year at university when she was released. In order to do that, she needed email to communicate with the university administration but her technology was causing her severe problems, as the following quotes highlight.

*When I came out I'd actually forgotten every single thing. I forgot all my passwords to my email and everything and I had to create a new one. I couldn't get into anything.*

Nina, V+2m

One month later, there was little change in her circumstances.

*I need to get a charger for my laptop as well. I've got 2 laptops and 2 chargers and I came back and neither of them worked [laughs – almost hysterically]. I can't really do anything.*

Nina, V+3m

Lack of email while in prison had also been a problem for Nina since the university to which she was hoping to return had been emailing her during her incarceration and as she had not responded, they had withdrawn her from the course.

Most participants had a mobile phone but it was a 'pay-as-you-go' and they had little money for credit so phoning all the organisations to get their lives sorted out was difficult. Texting was usually the only affordable option and as yet, most large learning organisations do not cater for text messages.



Although resources in prison had been limited, at least they did exist. Participants lacked some basic resources immediately after release which may have affected learning and employment opportunities. Elliot was hoping to continue his studies. He had assignment deadlines shortly after he was released but lacked basic resources.

*I couldn't see a way of getting it done because I didn't have the books or my computer which ... hadn't been used for 3 years, I turned one of them on and it lasted for about half a day and a blue screen came up.*

Elliot, pilot+1yr

Some of his written material had not arrived from the distance learning provider and he found that computers did not survive long periods of non-use. It will be seen below (6.2.1.3) that technology was just one of his problems and Elliot had many more mountains to climb before he could continue with his degree. Rees was also having computer problems and felt that he was missing out on work opportunities,

*I haven't got access to a computer. The only access I have is when my mum's not working and things like that so it's a bit difficult anyhow. Well, it's doing my head in a bit actually ... [exasperated sigh]*

Rees, P+3m

He had had good computer facilities in his 'learning' prison and always typed his assignments. So it was rather ironic that, although his tutor had given him an extension for his latest assignment, he was unable to complete it because he lacked the facilities,

*I haven't got the materials to do the work. You don't want to hand in hand-written work, do you?*

Rees, P+3m

Like Elliot, Rees did not gain access to his online account and had not received the paper copies for his assessment which had been sent to the prison he left 3 months earlier. Eric had expressed his determination to do more distance learning in 5.5.2, “*it’s like eating a cookie, I’ve tasted it and now I want more*”. He had managed to organise the course and had a computer which worked and was really keen to get started on his new distance learning course but he, too, could not access his online assessment material,

*my course has started already and I’m trying to contact my tutor which I’m doing so far but I can’t access the online service ... I’m just excited to start it. I’ve read a few chapters and I want to get everything going but I can’t logon ... I need the TMA questions.*

Eric, H+1m

Most participants were full of hope when they left prison. They were fired up for learning but these quotes illustrate that they were finding many barriers in their way. These were not isolated cases and were not due wholly to the infrastructure but also due to unhelpful policies, procedural errors and delays related to organisational structures.

#### **6.2.1.3 Organisational structure**

There were multiple organisations which influenced the participants’ lives after release but, in particular, there was the Probation Service and, for those who were attempting to continue with their studies, there were the education providers. As with the multiple organisations in the prison, these post-release organisations were fragmented but they also had some obstructive procedures which provided barriers to learning and reintegration.

### *The Probation Service*

As most participants were on 'license', they had to report regularly to their offender manager, a probation officer in the Probation Service. The Probation Service has two main roles with ex-prisoners on license: to enforce the license conditions and to provide support to prevent reoffending. However, unfortunately that does not stretch to support for PHDL. For most participants in the present research, the Probation Service visits were seen as a necessary evil but sometimes their procedures appeared to be extremely unhelpful for the participants' learning and aspirations.

For 'low risk' ex-prisoners, the visits to their probation officer were initially every week and then gradually became less frequent. Elliot expressed clearly how the policies and procedures did not provide the service that he was expecting.

*There's no follow on, you're in the open on your own effectively. You're supposed to have a probation person that looks after you ... but of those weekly visits in the first months I only saw her once, and every other time there's a signature because she wasn't there, and then it went to 2 weeks and sometimes she would be there and sometimes she wouldn't and I had to sign a piece of paper to say I haven't seen the police I haven't been in trouble and I haven't moved*

Elliot, pilot+1yr

Elliot's sentiments were common among other participants. For example, Sheena had immigration issues, no money and no job. She had hoped that the Probation Service could help her and found it frustrating when she was unable to discuss her concerns,

*I haven't seen her for the last month. Every time I go there she's not there. She gives me an appointment to come when she's not there ... I have seen someone else but they are not too familiar with the details.*

Sheena, V+2m

She clearly had a lot of problems but the Probation Service appeared to be unable to provide her with the support she needed. Other participants were particularly frustrated by the lack of response from the Probation Service since they had a long way to travel to their appointments. For example, Rees had to catch a train to see his probation officer. He explained,

*The first 2 times I saw her it was literally for about 10 seconds. I came in – she said, “oh you’ve turned up, oh you can come back next week if you want.” So I didn’t have a chat with her ...*

Rees, P+3m

During this time, shortly after release, when he was feeling very confused and vulnerable, a discussion with his probation officer about continuing study could perhaps have prevented him from abandoning his psychology course. It was a similar story for Nina who had a 45 minute journey on two buses to her probation office. The cost of the travel was supposed to be borne by the Probation Service but Nina explained why she could not use the bus passes they provided as they drew too much negative attention towards her,

*They give tickets and stuff but I don’t like it because the bus drivers they stop you and stuff like that. Because it’s an old, you know, those old bus passes and it’s not - I don’t know, because people don’t normally use those any more, and so I just don’t take it. I get my family to pay for it. It’s embarrassing because I’m showing it to them and they’re saying, “Oy can you come back?”*

Nina, V+2m

Nina had been so confident before her release but this embarrassment and perceived stigmatisation had not helped her already waning self-esteem.

All participants were aware of the power of the probation officer. They knew that if they did not adhere to their license conditions they would be recalled (returned to prison) very quickly and there were many comments about how this was of great concern. For example, in prison Alan had felt that his PHDL had helped him to grow up, *"I stop and think about the consequences of things now before I do them"*. So, when he wanted to move in with his new partner, he knew he had to inform the Probation Service of his change of address. Ironically, that was not good enough. As discussed above, probation officers were often absent when participants visited so when Alan's probation officer was absent, he told the duty officer about his change of address instead. He explained what happened next.

*So the area manager seen that I've moved address and, in their eyes, my probation officer is on leave so they can't know so I got recalled the same day.*

Alan, S+10m-recall

Alan believed he had been recalled back to prison on an administrative error due to lack of communication. Elliot, too, complained about lack of communication. He had an exemplary record in prison. He was a trusted prisoner and had a good relationship with the probation officer who had visited him in prison but, on the day of his release, his probation officer changed. The new probation officer knew nothing of his case and refused to sign the forms which would allow him to gain access to his online study materials.

*So the day I left [prison] my probation changed... to another one who I didn't know ... and basically nothing gets sent between anyone and although I'd done 2 and a half years of perfect behaviour, and helped and accredited for all the help, I started from the viewpoint of being nothing... I wasn't allowed to have contact with the [distance learning provider] to begin*

*with at all, not in any capacity, not allowed to send [assignments] in. That took about 4 weeks to settle, and it took another 5 months before I got full access to the website and allowed to speak to my tutors.*

Elliot, pilot+1yr

This lack of communication between the Probation Service, the prison and the distance learning provider was very common and one of the main reasons why participants failed to continue their learning after release.

Despite this having a detrimental effect on his studies, he explained why he felt unable to challenge his probation officer's decision.

*When she turns round and says I'm busy, I can't challenge her because I don't want to aggravate her as she has ultimate power over me. So she can just, through any reason, say 'you're going back to prison' and then I have to challenge it but by that time I'm in prison, so it's very difficult.*

Elliot, pilot+1yr

This power of the Probation Service not only meant that Elliot had to wait nearly six months to access his online distance learning material but also lowered his self-esteem. His status was no longer that of a trusted and responsible prisoner but that of a powerless 'ex-prisoner'.

Many participants recognised that the probation staff were under pressure to cope with the demands upon them, but that did not help their situation. The Probation Service was part of participants' lives after release, their permission was needed for almost everything they did, and, as Elliot had explained, that included continuing to study. However, the Probation Service was not the only problem associated with continuing to study. There were also the education providers whose organisational structure was sometimes similarly unhelpful for its potential students after release from prison.

### *The education providers*

The transition from prison to the community was a difficult time for all participants. There were so many things to deal with in those early weeks and months that study was often a low priority. Policies and procedures of colleges and universities were also perceived to be mostly unhelpful. Almost all participants were disappointed (at the very least) with the response and lack of support they received post-release from all types of education provider. Some participants were extremely annoyed.

Elliot (above) was just one of many participants who wanted to continue studying upon release but found the administrative processes time-consuming, difficult and often upsetting. In his case it was the Probation Service who held up the process and it will be seen (in 6.2.2) that it was one specific distance learning tutor who helped him, but often the distance learning policies were the problem. For example, Jonah had nearly completed his degree when he was deported. Being deported meant that he was not on license so there was no Probation Service to deal with. He had not anticipated a problem with being able to continue with his studies. He was therefore very upset about the time that it had taken to gain access to his account online.

*It took a very long time to get access. I found it very upsetting actually and I nearly threw in the towel. It took the [distance learning provider] more than 4 weeks to reply. I had no access to my university home page. I had no idea how I could get access. Because I didn't have any access I neglected my studies. ... Then about 3 weeks ago [my tutor] sent me an email and told me that I needed to send my assignment. I have now only a day to complete it – it must be there by tonight. The last one is due tomorrow and I must do it tonight... And well they messed up my exam because apparently there was a deadline for taking the exam in [his country]*

Jonah, S+2m

The lack of information regarding his exam had meant that he had missed the deadline and he needed to wait another year to retake his exam. This was very frustrating for Jonah but he had not “thrown in the towel” because he had nearly completed his degree and was determined to succeed. However, further problems led to his inability to complete his degree because the course he needed was not offered in his country. Jonah explained why that was particularly disappointing,

*A couple of years ago I asked someone at [the education provider] if I would have any problems with moving back to [his country]. She said no, you shouldn't have a problem with that because they are a partner and everything will be sorted. But the reality is a bit different.*

Jonah, S+2m

The majority of participants who wanted to continue their PHDL were extremely frustrated by the lack of information about who, what or where to contact about their studies. Some tried to use the telephone numbers on their distance learning provider paperwork but received no response from these generic numbers. Tina tried ringing the main switchboard.

*I tried to talk to the distance learning department or something like that but I couldn't get through and they wasn't getting back to us ... it's really frustrating because they were supposed to call me back and they haven't.*

Tina, D+3m

This lack of response was not an isolated case and left participants feeling powerless. They were already dealing with significant stigma from others in society and they had expected more from their distance learning provider.

It will be seen below (in 6.2.2) that occasionally distance learning tutors were pro-active and were able to help the situation but most tutors were unaware of the procedures



required, had not been informed about their student's release or were not sufficiently aware of the student's difficult circumstances. For example, Nadish was released but did not know what to do about his studies. Nadish's tutor knew he had been released from prison but had not attempted to contact him. The tutor was not aware that Nadish, without Internet access, would not know who to contact or how to complete his assignments.

*I'm sorry to report that I've had no contact whatsoever with Nadish and was under the impression that I couldn't contact him due to the need to keep email details secure. I haven't received either of the two [assignments] due so far.*

Distance learning tutor

Nadish, whose main aspiration was to complete his degree, failed the course. Rees also failed his course after release. Rees's tutor had been very helpful while he was in prison and had sent him some extras books to read so when Rees was released he contacted his tutor to discuss the course and to ask for a delay to his next assignment. Thereafter, the tutor attempted to communicate with Rees via email. Rees did not have a computer at home (see 6.2.1.2) and had no access to email so communication broke down. Neither Rees nor his tutor was aware of the correct procedure and did not officially inform the distance learning provider about Rees's release from prison. Rees's address on the distance learning provider system was still the prison, which is exactly where his offline assessment material was automatically sent and he failed the course.

Like many other participants, Rees perceived his life to be very chaotic in those early weeks after release and he did acknowledge that he was partially to blame for not being pro-active about the course.

*But it's not just the fault of the [distance learning provider], it's partly me too. I put the material in boxes [leaving prison] and honestly I haven't got a clue which box they're in and I haven't done anything with them.*

Rees P+3m

Clearly, in this case, there were a number of issues which led to Rees's failure of the course. However, with regard to distance learning provider's organisational structure, these quotes highlight the lack of known policies, procedures and support mechanisms, for students on release from prison.

It was a similar story from participants who were Released on a Temporary License (RoTL). For example, Estha was working on RoTL with a high-profile employer who allowed her full access to the Internet.

*It's so frustrating ... so many things that you're trying to do and then you hit these barriers. Why is it that I'm allowed to come out and have a very responsible job but [the distance learning provider] won't let me have online access to my home page.*

Estha, V on RoTL

Interestingly, she was one of the few participants who had easy access to email and the telephone, through her employment, and she was very determined. She had face-to-face meetings with managers at the distance learning provider, she telephoned the technical staff and she asked one of the governors of the prison to provide written permission for her to be allowed access to her learning material. Despite this, it still took her 6 months to gain access to her learning material online.

Nina's problems were a little different. As explained above, the full-time university to which she was expecting to return to complete her final year, upon release from prison,

had received no response to their emails and had withdrawn her from the course. She was devastated.

*Oh it's been such a nightmare trying to actually speak to someone. When I finally did they told me I've got to reapply for my final year so that means £9000 fees, that they are now, are going to apply instead of the £3125 I was paying. And, cos I've got a conviction now and I've got to basically declare that with my application and then they'll decide whether or not I can come back.*

Nina, V+2m

However, her problems did not stop there.

*And then to top it off, my student account with [a High Street bank]. They had me down as a graduate which meant that my overdraft was being charged interest but they're now asking me to pay over a grand [in back interest] which I don't have.*

Nina, V+2m

Not only had the university rejected her but the bank had also rejected her student status and she had difficulty dealing with these problems.

*I'm not quite sure where to start. There's so much to sort out. I don't know what to do first ...*

Nina, V+2m

These events were another serious blow to Nina's waning self-confidence and she needed some additional support to help her to overcome them.

### 6.2.2 Social support factors

There were a lot of structures working mostly against the participants and they knew that they needed a support network to help them to put their lives back on track so they could continue their studies and fulfil their aspirations. The support network consisted of family and friends, support from individuals and for a lucky few, there was a learning community. Dennis, looking back to when he was first released, clearly stated this.

*When you're released you need a support structure, whether it's your own and your immediate family and friends or whether it's from your probation service that can help you if you need it. If you don't have it you may as well carry on where you left off. And a lot of people don't have it. I've been fortunate and I'm well aware of that.*

Dennis, pilot+10yrs

Dennis had the support of a loving family to return to. However, there was an element of isolation for many newly-released participants as they tried to re-orientate themselves within the social world. Paul explained that the support network was not always there.

*What I found difficult was how many friends and acquaintances suddenly dropped off the radar. People who weren't prepared to talk to me, to help or anything like that. So there was a distinct bit of isolation and therefore the confidence that I might have had - and what the course was all about [evaporated].*

Paul, pilot+4yr

PHDL had given Paul great confidence when he was in prison. It had enabled him to rise above his prisoner status and survive the ordeal. That confidence had been eroded by the perceived stigma and isolation of being an ex-offender.

### 6.2.2.1 Family and friends

Some participants, like Dennis, had a family to support them in their journey back to society and knew they were the lucky ones but they also knew they needed to work at building those relationships as Elliot explained.

*I had my life to put back on track, I had my relationships to deal with, my family, my children, everything else. And everything you can imagine.*

Elliot, pilot+1yr

Sheena also had family around her from whom she drew a lot of support but she still lacked the basic information to help her organise her continued studies, which reflected on the poor resettlement process of the prison she had left.

*If I didn't have family I think I'd be at a loose end ... I wouldn't know where to go or what to do ... You don't get any preparation on what to do when you leave, you don't like get anything which says 'these are the people you can contact'*

Sheena, V+2m

She had many other immigration and financial problems but had not received support from anyone. Although her determination to overcome the barriers was still evident, she needed the extra support of her family to maintain that determination.

As Dennis had said above, friends and a support structure were important but they needed to be carefully chosen. PHDL had given Ernie, an ex-drug-dealer, a view of a different life, a 'normal' life where he was not afraid to look over his shoulder.

*... a guy who doesn't have to look over his shoulder every day... this guy who goes to work and comes home. ... he goes out with his friends and he*

*goes on holiday when he wants to and he comes back and he never has to look over his shoulder.*

Ernie, H-CatD

He knew that to make that life for himself he needed to stay away from people and things in his previous criminal past.

*The last thing that anyone wants to do is walk out the gate and go see your old friends and your old life, you really, really want to move away from there and move to a new area*

Ernie, H-CatD

Brian had explained above (6.2.1.1) that he knew that he could not solve his accommodation problems by staying with his drug-addict friends. Similarly, Tristan knew that he had to stay away from his 'mates' and for him that just meant not going out.

*I'm keeping myself out of trouble. I don't go out or anything now. I stay away from those people from before. I was in for fighting I was, see? ... I stay away from them on a weekend now.*

Tristan, P+2m

He was reflecting on his situation and making the necessary adjustments and he perceived that his learning was partially responsible for this new attitude.

*I'm not saying if it wasn't for that because I grew up a lot while I was in jail and I thought – oh I can't carry on getting into trouble and all-round .... But it was down a lot to the courses I done, the [distance learning] course in particular because I didn't get into any trouble in there and I thought well I*

*can't be coming out and getting into trouble either. It done me the world of good, it did.*

Tristan, P+2m

Tristan had grown up a little in prison but the reflection which he showed here was exceptional for one so young (19). His comments here suggest that he perceived that PHDL had developed maturation and he appeared to be seeing life from a different perspective.

#### **6.2.2.2 Support from individuals**

Most participants had perceived a distinct lack of support from the main organisations that were expected to help them. However, there were examples of dedicated individuals, from many different organisations, which provided support to participants. As previously indicated, except where there was particularly good practice, for example from a 'learning' prison, these individuals often worked against the system, ignoring unhelpful structural procedures or just going beyond what they would be expected to do in their role. For example, as seen above (6.2.1.3) Elliot had significant problems getting access to his study material. It took him 5 months, after his release, to gain full access to his online distance learning account and it was the perseverance of one distance learning tutor who eventually cut through the red tape.

*She carried on and refused to listen, it was only with her assistance that I carried the course on. If she hadn't done what she did and kept pushing I would have just given up the course... I was right on the end of a TMA and she got everything sorted out. She wrote the longest email to [Distance Learning provider staff] going through everything even some registration stuff*

Elliot, Pilot + 1yr

Sometimes, even when there was good practice, it was a matter of chance whether participants received adequate support or not. For example, the post-release mentors from the good practice, 'learning' prison could only provide support for those participants who remained in their geographical area. The stories of Kevin and Brian show the difference between those who received mentoring and those who did not. Kevin did not have a family to support him but he had looked upon those who had helped him in prison as his family (see 5.4.2). After his release, he was unable to access support from a mentor as he had been sent to a hostel outside the geographical area of the mentoring scheme. He had planned to do a psychology course, working towards becoming a drug counsellor, and knew that study would help him "*to focus and meet new people*", but the books for his next course had never arrived at his hostel. Sadly, Kevin was recalled back to prison. It was not clear quite why he had been recalled but he had gone back to drinking after some disappointments and arguments.

Compare this to Brian's story. He was also having a very difficult time in the early months after release, when his van broke down and he was unable to continue with his work. After arguments with his mother he had a period of unstable accommodation (see 6.2.1.1 above). Fortunately, Brian did have a mentor. The mentor had been seeing Brian regularly since his release. Mostly, he just met Brian for a cup of coffee and a chat but when Brian's van broke down he had been taking him to his probation appointments. He had also helped Brian to find a safe place to live, by personally going with him to see various hostels. Brian's probation officer seemed convinced that it was the mentor who had prevented his recall.

*Brian has been having a lot of problems and has been very depressed. If it hadn't been for the support he has received from [mentor] it is unlikely he would have survived this time and may have gone back onto drink and drugs. But he seems to have bounced back and he is due in next week.*



Both Brian and Kevin had completed one PHDL course in a 'learning' prison. They had both had the responsibility of the peer-partner scheme and both wanted to continue, but failed to continue, with their studies. They had both been partially transformed by their studies (see analysis in 4.4.3) although another course may have helped to develop that transformation. They were both recovering drink/drug addicts and had no stable accommodation. The difference between going back to prison, or not, appeared to have been, at least partially, due to Brian's mentor, who had provided him with the necessary support when he most needed it.

### **6.2.2.3 Communities**

In their in-prison interviews, most participants had expressed their perception of having a student identity and feeling that they belonged to a learning community. At that time they had high hopes and aspirations to continue their learning journeys upon release. However, many had left prison without the necessary information and guidance to continue that learning journey. Also, as seen above (6.2.1.3) the policies and procedures of the Probation Service and the education providers were not sufficiently supportive of continuation of learning. Unfortunately, that also meant that the participants did not have access to their distance-learning community. They very quickly lost their student identity. For example, in prison Sheena had felt pleased to be doing PHDL because she was part of a community, *"It let me feel more capable... of going out from prison knowing that I was part of something I can carry on with"*. She was more than half way through a degree in health and social care but she had immigration and financial difficulties (see above) and she feared that she would not be able to continue after all,

*I'm not able to do any courses and I don't know if I can continue with my social care degree ... I would like to finish it but I'm not sure where to go with it.*

Sheena, V+2m

Sadly, she did not secure funding and so her aspirations were disappearing. This also meant that she did not receive support from the learning community which could have been a source of advice and confidence.

There were one or two participants who did manage to continue their studies. For example, Manwell had left prison shortly before the cut-off date of his next assignment. He had a family so was able to share a laptop with his son. The two month delay in accessing his online material had affected his deadlines but his tutor had allowed an extension. He had received good support from a particularly pro-active regional member of the distance learning provider staff, had registered for his next course and his exam had been arranged. He found the experience of taking an exam with many others to be a frightening but a rewarding experience.

*For me it was quite a thing to go into the exam with another 3 or 400 people, so it was quite an experience.*

Manwell, M+6m

Manwell's acceptance as an examination candidate was particularly meaningful because it showed him that he was a member of society. He had struggled to find the documents required but was accepted anyway.

*I went early, and I did try and get as much ID as possible because you need something like with a photo or a driving licence or stuff like that ... But I didn't have a passport and I was still waiting for my driving licence to*

*come through so I took some bills and the gentleman who verified them, he was happy with it. I explained the reason and then he said "oh that is fine".*

Manwell, M+6m

This experience had increased Manwell's self-esteem but it was the distance-learning community he had discovered through online forums which had particularly raised his positive student identity. He had been really struggling to juggle his studies and his new life with his family. One night he went on the forum for the first time.

*One night I just thought "oh what am I going to do?" and then I just did some research and I found that some people, in comparison to me, they were even further away to get the project out. But there were people with experiences of more or less the same, you know, with deadlines for work and spending time with their kids and you know normal lifestyle really, you know at home, all that stuff. For me it was just that I didn't experience that before. I was thinking it was only me. Then I found out it was not just me. It does give you that extra boost.*

Manwell, +6m

This realisation that other distance learners had problems juggling family life and study too, was a revelation to Manwell and not only helped him to develop strategies to help but reasserted his belief in himself as a 'real' student. He realised that he was now doing and thinking as other distance learners with all the 'normal' problems of other distance learners.

Manwell's case was unfortunately not the norm and most of the participants who had aspirations to continue learning after release, had been bitterly disappointed. A supportive learning community could have been the structure which was needed in the lives of those newly released participants. Lack of such a community, and the loss of

student identity, may have been an important factor in why many failed their assessments or abandoned their study.

Nevertheless, some participants found other communities to which they could belong. Some were well-supported by charitable organisations. Susan was lucky enough to get voluntary work quickly with a Christian organisation. She explained how she got her first voluntary job,

*I just went in there [Christian book shop] one day and told them "I've been in prison. I understand I had to do it. I understand my crime ... they were talking and she said 'would you like to work here?" and I said "what?" she said "I've never ever done that to anybody before". She said "there was just something about you". My heart sort of leapt*

Susan, V+1m

Susan's aspiration was to continue with her studies in teaching and international development and these early weeks were about overcoming the immediate barriers, waiting for the opportunity to pick up her studies again. Therefore, to do voluntary work like that was important. It was a means of escape from the mindless low-level 'courses' in the hostel (see 6.2.1.1), providing her with something to do which was helping others, enabling her to belong to a community, in this case a Christian community, and developing her social identity. It also showed her that she had been accepted by at least some of society which improved her self-esteem. However, it was Susan's determination which had led her into the charity shop in the first place.

There was also some good practice regarding support for employment and the ability to belong to a working community. As mentioned earlier, some participants were lucky enough to gain employment before leaving the prison, on RoTL, with particular organisations which employ ex-prisoners (see good practice in chapter 8). Estha had a

high profile accounting job with an international organisation renowned for its support for ex-prisoners. She was convinced that her PHDL had enabled her to get the job.

*I had worked in business and done cash flow but nothing more than a bit of experience. Everything I've done with the [distance learning provider] – the business ... has all prepared me for this job. It [PHDL]'s given me the ability to be an independent learner, something I need to be able to do in this job.*

*[participant emphasis]*

Estha, V on RoTL

Two other participants, Sally and Stuart, had gained employment with another company which specifically sought out prisoners while they were still on their sentence. They often employed people on RoTL so by the time they were released their employees were already settled in their job. Sally explained how her employer had given her additional support on release and helped her to feel part of a community.

*The boss in one of the shops I worked in while I was on RoTL came to meet me from prison [at the gate, on release] and gave me somewhere to stay. She was great. She didn't have to do that*

Sally, Pilot+1yr

Stuart had similar support,

*... fantastic company to work for. They helped me when I got out – gave me time with my family, really supportive, told me that if I needed money they could help.*

Stuart, Pilot+2yr

This employer was not particularly interested in their crimes or what they had studied, what they were looking for was commitment and confidence, which these participants had gained in prison through their PHDL,

*I'd never have done it on the out. I was really proud of myself, especially the level 3 [Business Administration].*

Sally, Pilot+1yr

Sally and Stuart had been supported by the employer with a mentor, finance and accommodation and they had been given good jobs with a decent salary. This type of support had made a huge difference and enabled Stuart and Sally to integrate into society personally, socially and economically without needing to rely on their probation officer for help.

### **6.2.3 Psychological outcomes**

All participants had been finding it difficult to adapt to their life outside. In those early weeks and months, study was not a priority for most participants as they struggled to start bank accounts, buy food, look for or keep a job and basically try to adjust to their new life while still struggling to maintain their hopes and aspirations. However, even at this stage some found that there was a little part of them that was determined to succeed.

#### **6.2.3.1 Self-awareness and identity**

Some participants perceived that they were being labelled as a prisoner or an ex-offender and this had far-reaching consequences. For example, it was seen earlier (in 5.2.1) that Nina had maintained her student identity throughout her prison sentence and that was how she had been able to cope with prison. Events which had occurred since her release (see 6.2.1) had severely affected her confidence to the extent that she no longer saw herself as a student,

*I actually don't see myself as a student anymore because other people have taken that title away from me, basically, like the bank, the university and so I feel like, basically, an ex-convict that's a waste to society.*

Nina, V+2m

However, the determination and hopefulness she had shown in prison were still visible when she said,

*My priority is university. Being told that I'm able to go back and finish my degree. That's my aim.... I've just got to be positive. It's not easy.*

Nina, V+2m

A month later, there had been no improvement in her situation but there was still determination.

*I think in that first few weeks when I first came out I was so stressed and I was trying to sort everything out. At the moment I'm trying to take a step back and de-stressing. So I'm going slow but I know I'm going to get there.*

Nina, V+3m

Here, Nina was reflecting on her situation and showing clear determination to overcome the barriers remaining by taking things slowly and taking them a step at a time but claiming quite definitely that she would “get there”. Jed, too, had been feeling confident before he left prison. He had found his counselling and psychology courses transformational and had been a learning mentor in prison which had helped him to develop a positive ‘student’ identity (see 5.5.1). He knew that the road to recovery from drug addiction would be a long one but he was determined that this time he would make it and eventually become a drug counsellor. He had said, when he was in prison, that PHDL had given him “*hope which is all that I ask for*”. However, he did not feel that

he was being treated with any respect in the hostel and this had a negative effect on his identity,

*Well, before I left prison, I'd done everything right. I was a mentor, I was well respected and everything but now, well, I'm back to being nothing again. I'm just another statistic. It's totally demoralising in that I'm just a druggy.....*

Jed, F+2m

Jed also added that he was still determined to be a drug counsellor. He had not forgotten why he was doing his study in prison

*So whilst you're in there you've got to do something, getting yourself qualifications, especially if it's what you really want to do, and you get what you can out of it and rehabilitate yourself. And that drug counselling [course] wasn't just learning about the subject you was learning about yourself.*

Jed, F+2m

And he also still had that aspiration to be a drug counsellor, even if it had slightly adjusted from his original quote in prison.

*Well I want to be a drug counsellor. That's the long term goal. Well if not a counsellor then just working with them, just helping out or something.*

Jed, F+2m

However, he added something else this time which was interesting and showed that he was still quite hopeful of staying out of prison.



*I don't want to be super rich – not even a little rich, I just want to have a ...decent... life – a normal life.*

Jed, F+2m

#### **6.2.3.2 Resilience**

Throughout the early weeks and months shortly after release there was much frustration for participants who were finding so many barriers to climb. However, many of them were also showing their resilience by continuing to climb the barriers and not giving up. Elliot explained his frustration at not being allowed to access his study material during those first few chaotic months after release,

*Imagine waking up in the day having to do everything yourself where it's been done with you for 2 and a half years - those things I had to do plus have the [distance learning course]. To do all my [assignments] and not be able to do them because I'm not allowed to!*

Elliot, pilot+1yr

Once again, the prison had provided Elliot with a structure but that structure was removed upon release and it took time to rebuild. The added negative structures from unhelpful distance learning provider procedures were an added frustration. Here he was explaining the frustration which he felt, but he was not giving up, merely adjusting to the different structures by using his time differently. He did continue and was successful.

For those who failed to continue with their distance learning study there was disappointment and disillusionment. This just added to their burdens. For example, Rees felt he had let people down by not continuing,

*To be honest with you ... I'm a bit embarrassed really. I feel like I've let people down. I know I've had funding for it and everything and it's the same with [tutor]. I've got to call him and tell him.*

Rees, P+3m

The fact that Rees felt embarrassed suggested that he still cared. He had received good support from his tutor and had gained much from his studies and he was determined enough to want to call his tutor and apologise. The next quote also suggests that Rees wanted to return to his studies when life was less hectic,

*... you've seen by my marks so far that I've done it quite easily so it's a shame not to walk away with something isn't it? If I can do it again once I've calmed down it would be brilliant.*

Rees, P+3m

Sometimes the participants thought there was just too much to deal with and that they might go back to something easier but the resilience which they had developed through their PHDL prevented them from doing so.

*There have been days when I've just thought sod it. I think I'll go and do something that'll send me back to prison and it'll just be easier but I know that in the long term I won't be doing anybody any favours . If I was to go back in, I'd come back out in the same situation anyway so I have got my head about it as well. But it is frustrating sometimes. So going back is something I'm determined not to do. But sometimes you get so many challenges.*

Rees, P+3m

Nina had similar thoughts.

*I don't know. I've just got all these thoughts in my head and I'm thinking, you have to basically stand on your feet knowing that when you get out you're going to do something positive with your life otherwise you'll just go back into a life of crime and stuff. Because I've seen it with lots of people but I know that's not where I want to be anyway. So I've got to focus.*

Nina P+2m

These quotes from Rees and Nina show their frustration but they also show their resilience. They were considering going back but they would not do it. They have been able to reflect on their situation. They have considered their options and although, at times, going back to prison may appear to be the easiest option, they found good reasons for not going back.

#### **6.2.3.3 Hopes and aspirations**

In the chaotic post-release environment most participants were struggling to maintain their hopes and aspirations. Some were managing to still work towards them. For example, Andrew had managed to complete all the necessary paperwork and was scheduled to start his next distance learning course two months after release (see researcher reactivity in chapter 8). He was also using his studies in his consultancy business,

*I'm acting as a business consultant. I'm self-employed. I offer advice to people who want to start up a business – you know. And that runs in line with the course that I'm doing. So basically I'm just trying to keep it together and aim in the same direction.*

Andrew H+2m

He still had a long way to go to fulfil his aspiration of completing a degree but he was heading in the right direction. Ernie, however, was disappointed that life had not turned

out the way he had hoped. His aspiration was to continue studying but that was not working out. He was in the benefits trap like others (see 6.2.1)

*It was too complicated getting back into it. I spoke to the guy at the [distance learning provider] and it didn't sound like getting access to [distance learning course] was an option any more. I would need a loan... the rent on the flat's so high I got to stay on benefits ... so I didn't fall on my feet like I thought I would – it's harder than I thought.*

Ernie H+3m

He was clearly disappointed that he had been unable to continue his studies and he was finding life harder than he had anticipated but he was not deterred and kept that positive attitude which he had developed through his PHDL in prison.

*Yeah I'm tired of that [crime] man. I'm comfortable having no money and that you know. I know it's not about money now, it's about stability.*

Ernie H+3m

Ernie had been in and out of prison many times but he had now developed a new perspective, could appreciate stability over money and was still hopeful of a different future. Susan had also planned to continue her studies. She had actually started her international development distance learning course while in the hostel but had been unable to continue as she was doing the teaching course as well.

*The important thing for me is to finish the teaching certificate so I'm going to defer and start again in October depending on how things go.*

Susan, V+1m

Susan remained determined and with a positive attitude throughout this period. Like Susan, many other participants were still struggling but had managed to keep their hope and aspirations alive, and were demonstrating the resilience they had developed in prison through their PHDL.

### **6.3 Beginning to adjust: Improvements over time**

As time passed life for the participants became less hectic. Those participants who had survived the trauma of release were beginning to turn their life around and, in some cases, beginning to turn their attention back to those aspirations they had had in prison. The time this took was variable and the process was also gradual so participants may have been adjusting to one part of their lives but not to others. Some quotes in this section were therefore from the same interviews as some of the quotes above, which revealed chaos in their lives.

#### **6.3.1 Structural factors**

There were very few structural changes over time. Accommodation was probably the most significant physical structural change. Accommodation for most participants had improved slightly over the months although Brian was still awaiting a council house after 10 months so his aspiration of having his own business was not materialising. Although disappointed, he had been doing some voluntary work to keep busy, showing clear signs of generativity (see glossary in Appendix A) as he wanted to help people,

*I'm doing voluntary work one day a week - painting a shelter for those who are still heavily on drugs (that's not me like). I have nothing else to do so I thought I would do that. So that's alright.*

Brian, P+10m

After six months, Rees was able to move out of the bed and breakfast accommodation which had prevented him from working. Through a friend, he had managed to secure

employment with the [good practice] company mentioned in 6.2.1 which came with accommodation (see also good practice in chapter 8). He moved to another part of the country and was considering studying again.

Susan, too, had moved out of the hostel. She was still heavily restricted with an electronic tag but had a little flat near her elderly mother. She was considering self-employment to overcome the employment difficulties but was not yet able to return to full study,

*I'm doing a free IT course at the library at the moment ... I can't start any studying or anything yet. I need to get myself independent and paying for the flat and everything... but am also looking into my own business and applying for jobs helping asylum seekers.*

Susan, V+5m

Although Susan was unable to return to her distance learning she was still studying and integrating.

### **Infrastructure**

There were some slight improvements in infrastructure. Communication had improved and most participants had finally managed to access an email account although they did not all have adequate communication or computer facilities. For example, computing was still a problem for Brian, and especially now, as he had decided to start studying again,

*I have access at the library but will need a computer of my own if I am going to study ... I've actually got a computer ... it just needs bits to get working again... it doesn't like turn on at the moment so I'm going to take it apart and try and fix it. That's what I'm trying to do*

Brian, P+10m

Here Brian was showing his determination to overcome the barriers to start again. He was hoping to get a grant for a new computer to study but was still very worried as the grant was not going to arrive until after he started the course.

*I can't do without a computer [getting quite agitated]. ... I've got to get the computer, get set up on the Internet and everything and I'm going to be doing my course and I won't be able to do it.*

Brian, P+10m

Brian was really struggling financially and still had no credit on his mobile phone so was having great difficulty contacting the distance learning provider (see limitations in 8.2). However, Brian was clearly very excited about studying again and despite all the problems, he was still very determined.

### **Organisational structure**

There was very little change over time in organisational structures. However, one improvement was that participants' visits to the Probation Service became less frequent and, after 6 months, Nina was finally offered a probation officer who was closer to home.

*Did I tell you? I've got a new probation officer? ... Its only 10 minutes from where I live! But she's much ... better than the one before. ... she [the old probation officer] didn't actually have any explanation for any of the things she actually did... [the new probation officer] explains a lot more and is very supportive.*

Nina V+6m

This quote from Nina highlights the variation in support offered by staff in the Probation

Service and how the level of support offered to the participants was often a matter of chance.

### 6.3.2 Social factors

Although many of the participants were still not fully employed, some of them were beginning to widen their social net. Until this point, some of them had been quite isolated apart from close relatives. As the fog began to clear from the chaotic first few months so some participants gradually began to re-integrate into society. Brian was still not socialising with his old friends but had a new partner which meant that he was no longer in his flat alone.

*Yes, I got a girlfriend at the moment. Basically I haven't been seeing my friends at all like. They're not good for me. They're all idiots really. They're all still doing the same sort of thing so I go and see my sister and my niece and that but I'd rather stay in my flat with my girlfriend.*

Brian, P+7m

However, his perception that his friends were still doing the same sort of thing meant that he was not doing the same sort of thing. He was different – he had moved on. Nina, who had also been almost a recluse since her release, had begun to socialise which was a sign that she was beginning to regain some of her earlier confidence. Here she recalls her first social engagement.

*Oh, I went out for my friend's birthday – we had dinner on Saturday. That was really good, I haven't seen her for years – we went to school together and it was really good, apart from being sick everywhere ... I was sick on the bus, I was so embarrassed. But I met quite a few people on the bus and they were friendly. So I think I'm socializing a bit more.*

Nina, V+7m



This quote emphasises the change in Nina's perception of the world from her earlier depressed comments. Even though she was sick and embarrassed, she saw this as a socialising event. She also mentioned that the people on the bus were friendly. Thus she had begun to regain her previous positive identity (her student identity perhaps) which she had originally lost (see 6.2.3). Susan had not had so many problems socialising and had mostly kept a positive attitude throughout the difficult times since her release. However, the following quote also suggests her life was moving on, albeit with voluntary work rather than paid employment.

*I am still unemployed! But I do 2 days voluntary work and an IT course in [local town] plus church stuff and seeing my mum so am really struggling with the time to study...ironic eh?*

Susan, V+10m

The key point here was that Susan was studying again so the chaotic existence had begun to subside and she was returning to her original aspiration of study so her determination and positive attitude had remained with her throughout. She was not yet able to take the International development course but was on her way towards it. She was actually having difficulty in finding the time to study which was in sharp contrast to her comment when she was in prison where she found all the time to study. However, that was a comment that could be expected from any student and a sign that life was returning to 'almost' normal for her.

Other things were happening which showed a brighter side to living for the participants. For example, Manwell who had successfully continued studying, had found that his children were studying harder because they had seen him studying,

*... my kids, they see me studying. So in the past year, the academic level for them has changed. I have been receiving glowing reports from them as*

*well. Because it sent a message to them – oh so dad is studying – then I’m going to study... No, it’s good you know, family-wise, they see that if you’re home and you study and you’re trying to do something and changing for the better that is a massive deal.*

Manwell, M+6m

This comment clearly identifies that the benefits of PHDL for Manwell had been far-reaching. He perceived that not only was he “changing for the better” but he also had greater respect from his children and family who saw him as a role model.

### **6.3.3 Psychological outcomes**

As time passed, although there was still a lot of frustration, the participants began to adjust their perception of themselves in the post-release world. They began to alter their identity to fit their new roles and, for some, the determination which may have stemmed from their learning began to show through, giving them more resilience to deal with the problems that life threw their way.

As participants began to adjust to their new lives they could see that they did belong in society, that they were actually like other people, or, in some case, other students. A positive student identity appeared very important for building self-esteem and self-confidence which may have helped them to integrate back into society more easily. Doug had begun his learning journey in prison and his PHDL had enabled him to secure a place at university on his release. Here he shows how, for him, the graduation was the sign that society had accepted him. Even though he had been learning for a long time, he still needed that confirmation,

*The biggest thing that gave me butterflies the same as when I got released was graduation. It made me feel like I was part of society. It was a new circle of people, I wasn’t mixing with villains I was mixing with students and*

*I was part of society, with other students and it was just a completely different institution with a different attitude and conversation*

Doug Pilot + 10yrs

Doug's learning had been transformative. He had developed a strong positive student identity which had helped him to integrate into society. Manwell had also developed a student identity. He talked here about his study in prison and how he had felt the need to feel part of something.

*When you study behind closed doors, sometimes you come to find that you feel isolated and you're ... just waiting for some sort of response from your tutor ... so that sense of belonging is really important, that you are part of something that is constructive and then you are developing not only the opportunity but pursuing a career upon release.*

Manwell, +6m

Here, Manwell was showing a sense of belonging which had helped him to overcome those barriers initially and he had successfully maintained that sense of belonging by continuing to study on release and pursue his career.

Rees looked back at the chaotic existence immediately after release, explaining how there were so many things to deal with all at once.

*It's all these little things that all add up and they're only little tiny things and I honestly can understand why people just come back in within months. When I was in there and boys were coming back, you know they'd leave and I'd see them again in 3 months, I'm thinking, "you're off your head" [laughs] but when actually having walked in their shoes you can actually see why because it's just so much easier inside.*

Rees, P+6m

Here, Rees was able to reflect on what had happened to others and although he admitted that it would have been much easier to go back to prison, he did not. He demonstrates resilience in continuing to climb those barriers. He had been unable to continue his studies but when asked what role his PHDL had played in his ability to reflect, he admitted that the education had enabled him to focus.

*The main thing I can tell you about education is that it's a good distraction for your mind to focus on.*

Rees, P+6m

Although, from the analysis (see 4.4.3), it appeared that Rees had not been fully transformed by his PHDL, it had enabled him to focus his mind and reflect on his situation. Manwell, too, explained how he had focused on his studies in order to be able to overcome the barriers.

*Prior to embarking on this journey, I wanted to think for the better. I knew that there would be hurdles in between. I would not let that put me off. I just dealt with them as they came and I was just focused in what I was doing. In that this is just part of the learning curve. So it was, you know, some remarkable experience. It's not always easy but, you know, I'm heading the right way.*

Manwell, M+6m

Manwell was clearly displaying the resilience which had carried him through. His first aim was to complete the course he was taking when he was released and that had been fulfilled. He was now studying two more courses, and was well on the way to his degree in environmental science.

These comments highlight the role of personal change from PHDL for the subsequent lives of participants after release. It shows how PHDL developed self-esteem and confidence which gave them choices for a different kind of life and had enabled them to more easily integrate back into society. However, Doug hints at the complexities involved in determining the specific role PHDL has played in life after prison,

*It's the support network and growing up, growing older, but education's helped because it gave me the confidence I'd lost years ago at school. It gave me confidence that I could achieve things*

Doug, pilot + 10yrs

Doug's comments here suggest an interaction between a support network, maturation and the learning process for improved confidence. Estha also shares her thoughts on how her studies gave her the confidence to change her life.

*Yes it's made me a lot more ambitious. The thought of having a degree under my belt now makes me think, now what else can I do? I would never even have considered having a Masters degree let alone the dream I had one night of being a doctor. I would never ever have thought that I could have done that. It's made me a lot more confident in my job. I probably wouldn't have got the promotion I've got now if I hadn't got that knowledge through doing my OU. So yeah I think the OU is great.*

Estha, V-RoTL

Estha's quote shows the confidence that her PHDL had given her. She now had choices in her life and a possible future which she had not previously even dreamed about. Dennis also looked back on his learning journey and expressed what his PHDL had done for him.

*I think that maturation is given more body if it's married up with education. Education by its very nature gives you knowledge, knowledge gives better understanding of yourself and the wider world and where you fit into it ... So for me it [PHDL] made me understand more where I come from and why I've done what I did and also to decide where I wanted to go with my future. It gave me choices and allowed me to make informed choices even within the confines of the prison system, which doesn't give you a lot of choices on a day to day basis. It's allowed me to plan for my future past the point where the walls stop being my boundaries.*

Dennis, pilot+10yrs

Like Doug, Dennis had matured, but Dennis suggests that the PHDL enhanced that maturation. He understood his past but could also see a future. He could see that future even when he was in prison, which highlighted how he had been transformed before he left prison. Like Manwell, Estha and Doug, PHDL had given Dennis choices in his life where before there had been none. All these participants had changed their frame of reference. They were able to reflect on their situation from a position of relative stability. Having continued with their studies post-release, they had become members of society with choices and a future.

## **6.4 Participants' views on improvements needed**

Many of the participants had their own views on what should be improved. With regard to resettlement issues and information through the gate, Elliot had strong views. He believed prisoners being released should be given a "passport" which provided them with the information necessary to cope in those early weeks and months.

*There should be a passport to leave with you. It should include all your interventions all the relevant stuff all signed up by the relevant departments, and that's handed to you when you leave with all the local info so it'll also give you what doctors to go to, some things you forget about, like swimming baths, I know it sounds silly but it shows someone's thinking about it, and the local pop in centre...and even something as simple as having all the department works and pensions set up ... so when you get out the door to make sure your housings set up, you've got a regular stream of income and you're seeing the probation person for a good reason ... where you go, what to declare, all the jobseekers allowance and all that.*

*How to write CVs ...*

Elliot, Pilot + 1yr

He also suggested that prisons should have group tutorials by the distance learning provider.

*They could use that [group tutorials] for other people as well, not just for people who're enrolled, but for potential enrolees so you could have a lecture that involves those people, you could have quite a few people in a lecture like that. Most prisons would be able to hold 30-40 people in a room so they can facilitate that*

Elliot, Pilot + 1yr

Manwell was one of the few students who did manage to continue with his studies after a very frustrating few months. He suggested that distance learning providers should improve their information to students in prison who are due for release.

*When they [students] come out of prison they need something to help in that first few weeks. It's a critical time because it all comes at once ... if you*

*would advise that person ... look, if you are going to carry on with your studies, this is the scenario and these are the things you are going to be challenged with. You're not going to be able to log on straight away because you're going to be assessed first. And then, by the time you are sending in an assignment you need to get your bearings with technology.*

Manwell, M+6m

Estha wanted one point of contact with the distance learning provider which would allow newly released ex-prisoners to organise their online access easier. Remembering her six month fight to gain access to her course material, she also wanted other prisoners who were working out on RoTL to have full access to their online distance learning material.

*If they could just have a contact which worked within [DL provider] so this [online access] could happen easier ... those working out with no security issues should be allowed full access to their [learning material]*

Estha, V-RoTL

Ernie had suggestions for inductions in the open prisons, which he felt would help many more prisoners to follow a learning route towards more successful integration on release.

*Show me the kind of jobs I can do ... show me all the courses I can do like Open University and other things I can do ... It's there that this whole thing, well it starts off by showing me this life, this family, this guy who goes to work and comes home. He hasn't got to look over his shoulder if someone offers him drugs ... Then show them the other side – the druggy ... I'd guarantee that everyone who comes to jail would change – just by showing them the 2 sides. Cos most of us have never seen that other side of the*



*picture you know. We've come from broken homes and stuff like that so we need to get into our head that we want to go to university. We need someone to sit with us and talk to us and tell us that we want to do [PHDL] and we would do it.*

Ernie, H-Cat D

## **6.5 Chapter conclusions**

This chapter has presented the thematic analysis of the post-release interviews and thus participants' perceptions of the role of PHDL in life after release. Building on the analysis of the in-prison data, analysis of the post-release data developed further the themes of structural, social support and psychological factors which were identified in chapter 5.

In prison there had been a structure to the participants' lives but on release they lost that structure. Life immediately after release was chaotic for all participants. There were perceptions of immense physical, infrastructural and organisational structural barriers impeding personal and social integration into society. These barriers reduced confidence and self-esteem and eroded the positive student identity and high hopes with which many participants had left prison.

The physical structural barriers in the immediate post-release environment included unstable, unhealthy accommodation which was inappropriate for learning, and stigmatisation which prevented participants from continuing to learn or from gaining suitable employment. Most participants found the whole process of looking for work extremely demoralising and far harder than they had anticipated. The work they found was often menial and very far from the employment or college places they had anticipated. Those college places had not materialised and, although there was no proof, it was thought that the reasons were related to the participants' criminal past. Some were unable to work or they would lose their benefits and their accommodation,

which only added to their frustration as they had no money and their health was suffering. Self-esteem dropped sharply. There was very little support offered at this time, except for the good practice employers who ultimately employed at least four of the participants, giving them not only a good career, self-worth and money, but also provided accommodation and support. Some had family or a mentor for support but for others it was only their resilience which prevented them from returning to prison. Some, like Kevin, were unable to cope and were recalled to prison.

The post-release infrastructure involved a severe lack of information and communication technologies. The most immediate problem shortly after release was the lack of electronic communication for participants to organise their lives in a fast-paced digital world. Old computers and forgotten email passwords caused a lot of frustration and made integration into society so much more difficult. Most participants only had 'pay as you go' text-only mobile phones which made communication with large organisations impossible. Information in prison had been in short supply and in particular, the information for prisoners who were due for release. That pre-release information such as who, what, when or how to contact about continuing their studies was fundamental. Its absence caused great hardship for participants after release and was perceived to be a cause of course abandonment or failure.

The organisational structures included the perceived obstructive policies and procedures from key organisations, such as the Probation Service, the distance learning providers, as well as colleges, universities and banks. These policies and procedures meant that participants had almost insurmountable barriers to continued study or suitable employment. Some practices caused participants to feel powerless or worthless and were partially responsible for lack of continued study and at least one recall to prison. Distance learning providers had made an effort to provide a service to their students in prison but the service broke down upon release. The providers were

often perceived to be unresponsive to the released students' needs as they worked on the principle that students could and would notify them if they needed anything whereas that was not the case. Gaining online access to course material was a particularly obstructive procedure which involved both the distance learning provider and the Probation Service.

The social support factors which participants needed to help them to overcome these structural barriers and put their lives back on track, consisted of family and friends, support from pro-active individuals in organisations and for some there were charitable, working or learning communities. Those participants who had a family to support them in their journey back to society usually perceived themselves as the lucky ones. However, they still needed to work at re-building those family relationships and some of the younger participants, especially, did not necessarily get their family's support for continued learning. Friend's support needed to be carefully chosen as participants were unable to return to the friendship groups which were connected with their previous criminality. Individuals such as mentors or pro-active staff often worked against the system to provide the participants with the help they needed. Charities provided a variety of supportive environments such as voluntary work schemes and there were some good practice employers who provided structured support as well as suitable employment. For the few who successfully managed to continue with their studies, there was a learning community which raised self-esteem and rebuilt a positive student identity. Sadly, due to the structural barriers in the first few months, the majority of participants failed to continue their studies and were therefore unable to access that learning community.

The psychological factors were related to the positive student identity, resilience and hope with which most participants had left prison. In the early weeks and months after release their positive student identity was seriously challenged by negative labelling

such as 'ex-con' and 'druggy'. Participants were frustrated by the unexpectedly difficult barriers which were in place and disillusioned by the failure to complete their studies or fulfil their aspirations. However there was also determination. Those who had developed resilience from their PHDL were more determined to overcome the structural barriers. They maintained much of their hope which appeared to make the difference. Rather than abandoning their unfulfilled aspirations, they adjusted them and continued towards them. Despite having days when they thought it was all too much and considered reoffending in order to return to an easier existence in prison, they did not. They were able to reflect on their situation and reassess their options. They were also better able to seek out the social support, especially the communities, which helped them to maintain or re-develop their self-esteem and positive personal and social identity.

As time passed, the barriers reduced slightly and the chaos subsided. As life became more tolerable, self-esteem and confidence increased and some began to think about studying again. The findings revealed that PHDL had provided a resilience which had enabled some participants to maintain their hope that they would ultimately achieve their goals. They appeared to be in a better position to be able to pick up their lives and rebuild their positive personal and social identity. Maturity certainly seemed to have an effect but there was a perception that PHDL developed or enhanced that maturity. Those who were able to maintain a positive personal and social identity were better placed to successfully integrate into society. Those who lacked resilience developed from the PHDL were less able to take advantage of a support network, failed to prosper and many returned to prison.

This chapter has answered the second research question by identifying the role of PHDL in the learners' lives after release. Initially the participants were provided with positive student identity, resilience and hope which had enabled many of them to begin

to tackle the many barriers to continued study and integration upon release. The resilience was vitally important as a self-protective feature since there were so few organisations which were willing to provide support to these released prisoners. The hope was also important and those who maintained their hope were better able to pick up their lives in time, as the chaos of the early months subsided. However, one of the most interesting findings was that belonging to a learning community was perceived, by all involved, as a powerful force for integration. Those students who managed to continue studying, and had been able to access the learning community, were better able to rebuild their positive student identity which counteracted the stigma of negative labelling. They perceived themselves to be part of society and had a place in the world. They had more confidence, self-esteem, positive personal and social identity and appeared to integrate into society far more successfully.



## Chapter 7: Discussion: Learning journeys

*I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.*

(Mandela, 1994, p751)

### 7.1 Introduction

This thesis is about transformative learning for prisoners. The ethnographic and longitudinal research has investigated Prison-based Higher-level Distance Learning (PHDL) through the following research questions:-

1. In what ways is PHDL transformative?

- In what ways can it lead to personal change in the learner?
- How does that change relate to hopes and aspirations for future prospects and life chances?

2. What role does PHDL play in the learners' life after prison?

- How does it equip learners with personal and social qualities required to manage life after prison?
- How does it relate to their integration into society?

In attempting to answer these research questions the previous two chapters have presented the analysis of the data which suggests that PHDL may transform learners and may equip them with some of the personal and social qualities to help them to integrate more easily into society. However, the prison and the post-release environments were complex and the integration process extremely difficult so it was not possible to identify the exact role that PHDL played as opposed to other factors.

Mandela's quote is used to open this discussion chapter because it emphasises how many of the participants perceived their learning journey. Those who persevered and overcame some of the barriers to learning in prison had high hopes and realistic aspirations for a better future. However, they had perceived often unexpectedly large obstacles upon their release from prison which meant they had many more hills to climb in order to achieve some form of integration into society.

The emergent factors which acted on the PHDL students in prison, and thus enabled or impeded personal change, were the physical, infrastructural and organisational structures in the prison which were mediated by the social support from family, friends, individuals in organisations and the learning community. When those structural and the social support factors interacted positively, they sometimes led towards key psychological outcomes relevant to personal change and transformative learning such as positive student identity, resilience and hope. These translated into aspirations for future life chances. When the social support factors were unable to satisfactorily mediate the structural factors, the resultant psychological outcomes were pre-release anxieties which affected learning and in some cases led to course failure, abandonment and a less positive identity. The prison context affected the outcomes and the findings were presented for both a 'working' and a 'learning' prison (see 4.4.2 and glossary in Appendix A).

The psychological outcomes from transformative learning in prison, of positive student identity, resilience and hope, equipped the learners with the qualities to manage life after prison. Although there were immense structural barriers to integration in the post-release environment which eroded their positive identity, those participants who had developed resilience and maintained their hope appeared better able to pick up their lives in time. Where participants were able to continue studying, they were able to rebuild their positive student identity through belonging to a learning community, this



increased confidence, self-efficacy and self-esteem leading to improved potential for personal and social integration. However, when the participants lacked resilience and hope, they were less able to seek out the social support required to satisfactorily mediate the structural barriers. The resultant psychological outcomes, post-release, were then reduced self-esteem, reduced confidence and lack of control over their life. This reduced their ability to integrate into society and increased the potential for a return to prison.

This chapter presents a series of diagrammatic models which elaborate on these findings and are discussed in relation to the theoretical and empirical research literature. The in-prison model of the PHDL student's learning journey and the answer to the first research question is shown in section 7.2. The post-release model of the PHDL student's journey from prison towards integration into society, and the answer to the second research question, is discussed in section 7.3. Section 7.4 presents the whole learning journey from prison to integration and relates the findings to the desistance literature. A model of the transition (release) process compares the key factors before and after release, identifying those areas which may help to smoothe the transition and potentially ease integration. These are shown as bridges which could help to alleviate some of the problems for newly released PHDL students and therefore improve chances for successful integration into society. The chapter is concluded in section 7.5.

## **7.2 In-prison: in what ways is PHDL transformative?**

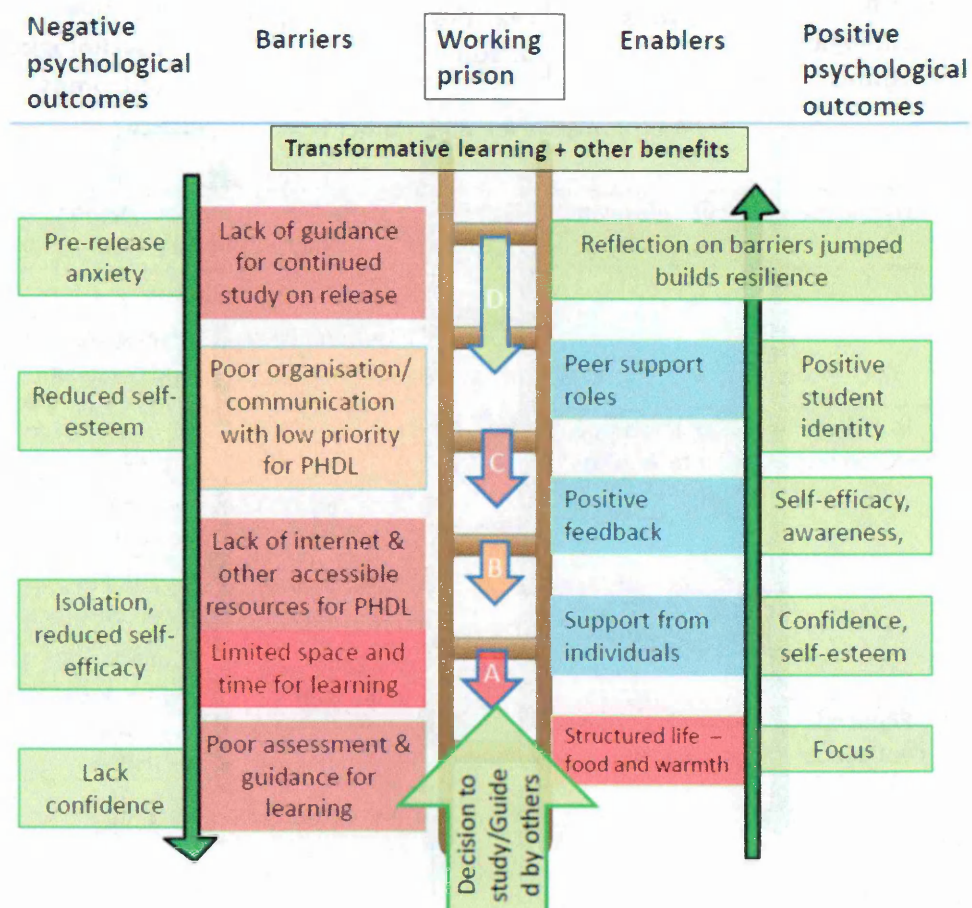
The findings suggest that the management of PHDL varies substantially from one prison to another and extends the concept of 'working' and 'learning' prisons the researcher proposed in the MRes research (Pike and Adams, 2012). In line with Wenger (1998), the learners bring a biographical perspective which shapes their learning, but context appears to be an important determinant in how they learn. In

developing a model of transformative learning in prison, it is therefore necessary to consider how those different contexts have affected learning. Figure 7.1 presents the model for a 'working' prison which does not prioritise learning and figure 7.2 presents a model for a 'learning' prison which provides dedicated space and time for independent learning.

The ladders portray the student's learning journey as a developmental processes as they overcome the many barriers which are restricting upward progression. The structural and social support factors are shown as forces which act on the learner; barriers acting downwards and the enablers acting upwards. In a 'working' prison, the structural factors are mostly barriers, as shown by the reddish colours (physical, infrastructure and organisational structure) on the left. The social support factors of family, individual staff and learning community are shown in blue and the psychological outcomes are shown in grey-green. The letters (A to D) along the trajectory are the exit points (arbitrarily positioned) to show where participants may not overcome specific barriers and may fail to complete or (fully) engage with their learning. Figure 7.2 has one less exit point signifying that in a 'learning' prison, PHDL is well-managed so there are fewer failures from administration or communication issues. These models are expanded and discussed below, in relation to the theoretical and empirical literature.

### **7.2.1 Decisions to start and continue studying: Motivation**

Motivation to study, both intrinsic and extrinsic, is affected by context. Although the present research has not focused on motivation, the structural factors and the social support factors affected the participants' decisions to start studying and may have marked the starting point of their transformative learning journeys.



Key to features:

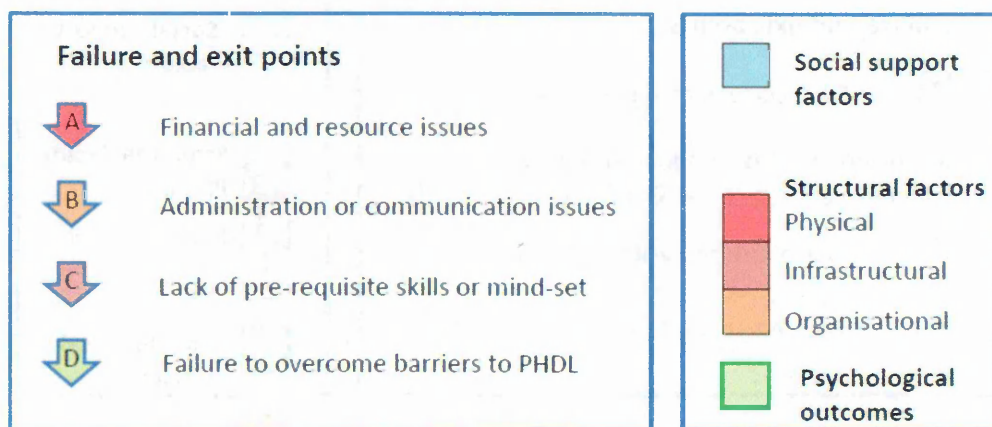
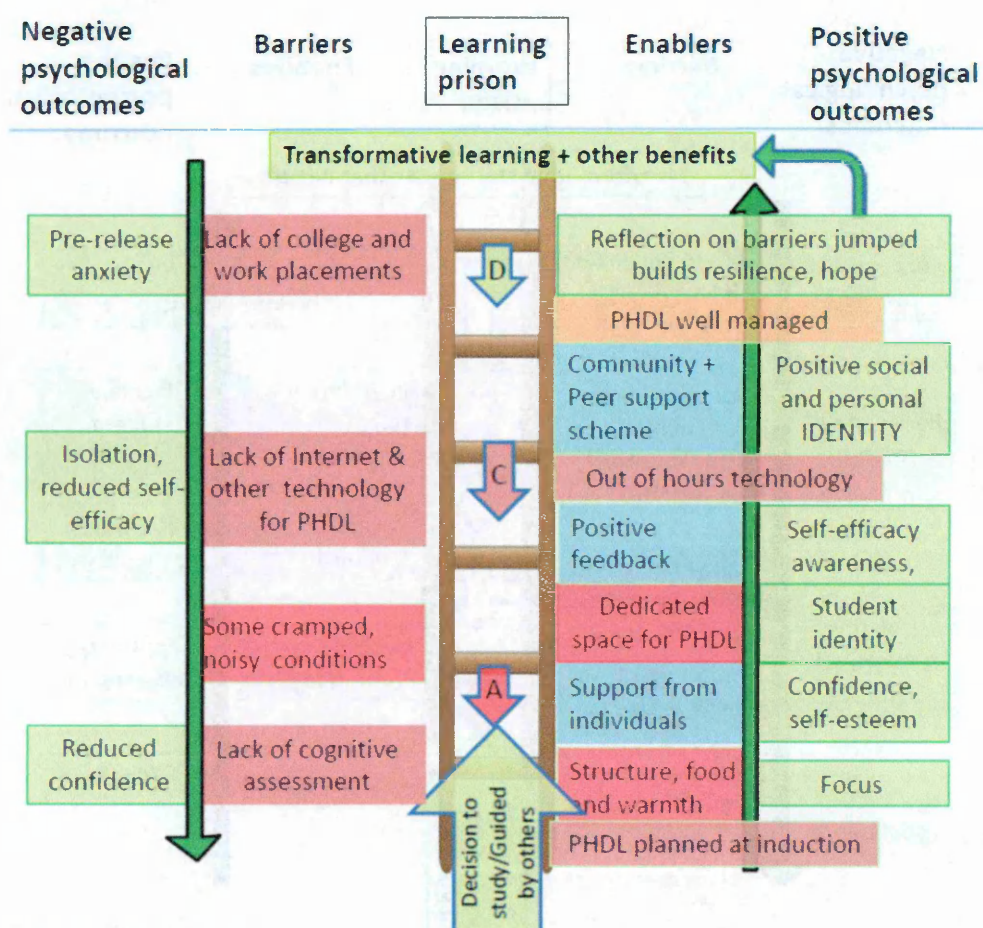


Figure 7.1 PHDL student learning journey in a 'working' prison



Key to features:

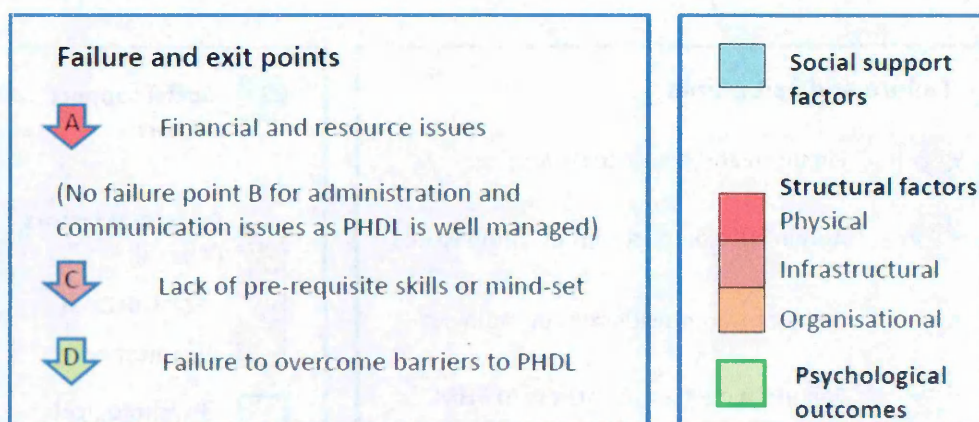


Figure 7.2 PHDL student learning journey in a 'learning' prison

As expected, the reasons for participants to start a course of (PHDL) were many and various and these findings are consistent with previous research (Cleere, 2013; Costelloe, 2003; Hughes, 2007, 2012). Also, in line with Ryan and Deci (2000a, b) their motivation to study varied in levels of internalisation. Time was a commodity in prison and most motives for PHDL stemmed from the need to use that time constructively but, consistent with Costelloe (2003), the prison-based reasons to start studying were extrinsically motivated and equated to the 'push' factors of Manger et al. (2010). Contrary to Cleere (2013) there was no evidence that they were specifically avoiding other less appealing activities in the prison but consistent with Forster (1976, 1998) they just wanted to fill their time doing something which enabled them to avoid thinking about being in prison and found distance learning enabled them to do that. Many of Cleere's (2013) participants were lower level learners and this may have accounted for the differences.

Difficulties in accessing the information and funding needed to start and continue PHDL were consistent with other researchers (Forster, 1976, 1998; Wilson, 2010). However, contrary to Costelloe (2014), starting PHDL was not a natural progression from other prison education. This finding may highlight differences in support for PHDL in Ireland and England. Other common reasons for starting to study PHDL were competence-building, qualifications and skills for potential employment upon release. These were partially extrinsic motives but consistent with Ryan and Deci (2000b), self-determination from having choices and autonomy from the opportunity for self-directed learning, led to more intrinsic motivation. Many admitted they had been steered into PHDL by individual members of education staff or peers who encouraged and nurtured a desire to learn. This concept of significant 'others' or 'special people' who encourage reticent prisoners into learning has been highlighted by many other researchers but consistent with Forster (1976, 1998) and Hughes (2012), the negative findings indicate that some learners were not ready for PHDL and failed to progress.

### **7.2.2 Barriers and enablers to transformative learning**

Many participants, even those who had been to prison previously, expressed their shock at being in prison. This shock could be the “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 1990, p13) which could start the transformative learning process and could be considered as an opportunity to reflect on their situation. As expected from the sparse empirical literature on PHDL, it was found that the prison was an exceptionally difficult environment in which to learn. Higher-level learners found many barriers to study and the process of PHDL varied across different prisons. Following Pike and Adams (2012), these ranged from the more common ‘working’ prisons in which higher-level learning was not valued or prioritised, to the less common best practice of a ‘learning’ prison which encouraged all forms of learning.

#### ***Induction***

Participants perceived an inadequate induction for learning on entry to most prisons. In a ‘working’ prison, this included poor initial assessment of learning level and ability, lack of time and space to reflect on their options and a lack of guidance for potential progression routes and outcomes which meant that some learners were unsuited or ill-prepared for independent study at a higher level. This was not to suggest that those individuals in the prison who had encouraged them to aspire to something better (see 5.2.4) were not appreciated, merely that there was insufficient guidance to the right (level) course. According to Merriam (2004), learners need an effective assessment to identify their cognitive ability since not everyone is suited to autonomous learning required for transformative learning. The findings here suggest that some of those who failed to engage may not have acquired the necessary epistemological developmental stage. If that was the case, then encouraging them to complete PHDL may well have

been detrimental to their future learning and have significantly reduced their confidence and self-esteem. These findings are consistent with Forster (1976) who acknowledged that those with lower previous educational qualifications were most seriously affected by isolation and alienation, suffered unusual levels of stress in assessment and were prone to lengthy depression upon failure.

The social support factors which mitigate this structural barrier are the individuals who, in some cases, work against the system to provide the learners with guidance and one-to-one support when struggling. The good practice of a 'learning' prison (see Figure 7.2) had a dedicated induction with knowledgeable staff who allowed time for assessment and reflection of needs although, even here there was scope for a more detailed assessment of cognitive ability. The organisational structure in a 'learning' prison also ensured that the plan for learning towards their aspiration was incorporated into their sentence plan so learning was coordinated with their resettlement aims. In a 'working' prison, the fragmented organisational structure restricted this concept as it would require all organisations to work together with the same prisoner-student-centred aims which were not the case. Forster (1976) also highlighted differences in initial support for PHDL across his five prisons although in 1976 the PHDL provision was quite different, with far more informal support from outside agencies such as the Workers Education Association.

### ***Space, time and technology for learning***

The second key barrier to transformative PHDL to emerge from the analysis, was the space, time and technology for deep, critically reflective learning in prison. This was a combination of all three sets of structural factors. The physical structures restricted space and time for learning. For example, unlike the classroom-based students who attend the 'third space' or 'emotional zone' of the education department (Crewe et al., 2014; Wilson, 2007), to do their studies, distance learners study most of the time in



their cells on the wing, in the 'reality' of prison, with mostly cramped, noisy and inappropriate learning spaces.

The infrastructure led to insufficient technology for learning and a lack of good communication processes in the prison which meant that participants were unable to adequately communicate their needs. Previous research (Pike and Adams, 2012; Turley and Webster, 2010) had suggested that the Virtual Campus held potential and could improve facilities for distance learners. However, the Virtual Campus did not feature positively in participants' accounts and has not yet provided its promised potential. A 'learning' prison, although still lacking the Virtual Campus and the Internet, enabled computing technology and other resources to be made available for distance learners outside working hours (see 5.3.2).

The fragmented organisational structures in the 'working' prison led to multiple other priorities on the participants' time and the technology-enabled spaces were being used for other activities other than PHDL. Lack of interaction with the learning materials, particularly those which encouraged reflection, reduced potential to develop reflective practices. In line with Taylor (2000) it was found that the lack of discipline-specific contextual support reduced the potential for deep learning and the lack of interaction with tutors or other students reduced stimulation for optimum thinking and the potential to examine their assumptions. A 'learning' prison provided examples of how more time and space could be given to valuable reflective learning experiences if distance learners were provided with a dedicated learning environment where learning was more collaborative and learners were given responsibility for their own learning (see 5.3.1).

The social support factors which mediated these structural barriers to transformative learning included individual support from organisational staff such as distance learning tutors and individuals within the prison who provided organisational support and



additional resources in spite of the system. Positive feedback from distance learning tutors is seen as being particularly important for the less confident learners. Where the responsible peer support roles were encouraged, there was increased discipline-specific support but more importantly, a greater sense of belonging to a learning community with improved student identity. In a 'working' prison, peer mentoring was an occasional reward, but in a 'learning' prison it was a specific organised scheme. These findings are consistent with those of Hughes (2012), who highlighted the importance of these responsible roles and noted that their use and encouragement varied across prisons.

### ***Information for release***

The third key barrier to transformative PHDL was the lack of information for participants to continue their learning on release. This caused significant pre-release anxieties which affected learning but also prevented participants from successfully continuing learning upon release. The full implication of not having enough information before release is highlighted in the post-release discussion in 7.3. The social support factors which mitigated this structural barrier were, once again individuals, such as prison education staff, distance learning tutors or family members who provided information which could improve the possibility of continued education or employment on release. However, a 'learning' prison showed good practice in following through its participants' learning plans which provided them with more potential for fulfilling aspirations; helping them to apply for college and setting up continuation distance learning courses. This gave them an improved chance of continuing learning upon release and provided employment opportunities which improved potential for economic integration. The good practice 'learning' prison also provided a mentoring scheme for post-release support which was fundamental in preventing at least one participant from returning to prison (see 6.2.2.2).

### **7.2.3 Psychological outcomes: transformative learning**

Despite the perceived significant structural barriers to learning in prison which have been discussed above, it was found that PHDL was transformative, or at least partially transformative, for many participants. In answering the first research question, the key psychological outcomes which led to personal transformative change in the learners were student identity through belonging to the learning community, resilience from overcoming the barriers to learning and high hope with realistic aspirations for the future. Some accounts of transformation were almost religious in their intensity which also suggests a moral development. Reflecting Mezirow's (1997) developmental model, by becoming autonomous learners who belonged to a learning community, they had shifted their frame of reference and had a different way of knowing. They were able to see the world differently and how they fit into that world so for some participants PHDL did indeed appear to be transformative.

#### ***Student identity***

Confirming earlier research (Hughes, 2012; Jupp, 2010; Pike and Adams, 2012), the development of a student identity through PHDL was imperative to transformative learning and could be seen as an appealing replacement for a prisoner or criminal identity. This was consistent with (Cleere, 2013). In line with Costelloe's (2003) traditional non-participants and Manger et al (2010)'s 'pull' factors, the participants' motives for learning became more internalised as they reflected on their learning and developed greater awareness of themselves and others. They perceived that PHDL really could change the course of their future but contradicting Costelloe (2003), these included participants with a prior education who also developed through their learning. The present research specifically excluded the sex-offenders who may have skewed Costelloe's (2003) findings. It was interesting that maturation was perceived to have been accelerated by the PHDL process (see 5.5.1) and was perceived to be a key

enabling factor throughout the whole learning journey. This agreed well with developmental learning and lifelong desistance theories (cf. Laub and Sampson, 2003).

Wenger (1998) argues that belonging to a learning community is important for confirming new student identities. Participants felt the need to belong to a community which linked them to the outside world and to which they could remain connected when they were released. This suggests that their student identity was not only a personal identity but also a social identity. In a 'learning' prison, participants were provided with an actual space for that learning community which provided an environment for peer support and a further sense of belonging (see figure 7.2). Participants in a 'working' prisons (see figure 7.1) lacked the space to study with other students and felt quite isolated a lot of the time but they did still consider themselves to be part of a distance learning community. Sometimes social networks developed from opportunities for mentoring, teaching or support roles. The networks and communities, through interaction and shared norms, helped all of these learners to develop social identity and the peer-partner roles enabled them to give something back, through being able to help less educated prisoners. These generative acts, this giving back, nurtured responsibility and trust and promoted self-esteem and confidence. All these opportunities helped to develop the participants' sense of belonging which, McNeill (2013) claims, contributes to improved re-integration on release (and is discussed further in 7.4 below).

The findings that positive, personal and social, identity was developed through responsible peer positions and through learning communities, are consistent with Hughes (2012) and Pike (2009) who highlighted the benefits of informal communities among distance learners. They are also consistent with Cleere (2013) who identified more generativity and social capital among those prisoners who had participated in education. The current research has not focused on social capital but there may

certainly have been an increase in social capital among those participants who developed strong positive social identity through belonging to a learning community or holding responsible positions. Further research could investigate if this does indeed lead to increased social capital. Similarly Reuss (1999) argued that the collective group experience of the Leeds course in a maximum security prison was an extremely beneficial environment for learning but that course was classroom-based. The current research therefore extends Reuss's findings, highlighting that a collective group environment can also be beneficial for distance learners as it alleviates the isolation and other difficulties of distance learning. Duguid (1981), when developing his "island community" (p 154) attempted to create a mini-campus within the prison which could allow learners to function at Kohlberg's (1977) higher stages. Recent research by Crewe et al. (2014) also showed the importance of a space which was free from oppression in the prison philosophy classroom. These findings therefore build on the previous research by providing details on how distance learners perceive themselves to be part of a learning community and how their ability to belong is accentuated by a physical space for higher-level learning within the prison.

### ***Resilience***

The learning was perceived to be not fully transformative for everyone who engaged with their PHDL courses. This could be related to the fact that so many participants had only completed one or two introductory courses and more research should investigate this point. However, there were many other benefits from what Kegan (2000) suggests is 'informative' learning and which could be stage developments towards transformative learning. For example, there was the development of confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy and determination. In particular, it was found that participants developed resilience through reflection on how they overcame the structural barriers, already discussed. This resilience was found to be a vital component in helping participants deal better with the significant barriers they faced after prison (see 7.3). These findings

extend the work of Hughes (2007, 2012) who also found resilience in her research participants and suggested that it may be useful on release, but her study was not longitudinal.

### ***Hope***

According to (Snyder et al., 1991), hope is fuelled by a perception of successful agency with respect to goals which is influenced by perceived availability of successful pathways which could meet those goals. So, it is not enough to have the goal but for hope, one must also have a realistic plan of how to achieve it. It has been found that realistic hope and aspirations are associated with successful PHDL and are an indication of the transformative potential of the learning. Most of the participants had aspirations for a crime-free future, but only those participants who were perceived to have been, at least partially, transformed by their learning had realistic plans for achieving those goals. The longitudinal study of Burnett and Maruna (2004) found that those who had high hope were better able to cope with social problems on release and these hopes and aspirations are revisited post-release (see 7.3.3).

### ***Negative psychological outcomes***

Not all the outcomes were positive. There were a significant number of negative psychological outcomes from the many barriers to study and these worked against transformative learning. Some participants fell by the wayside and those who did not engage with their studies were sometimes negatively affected by PHDL, with feelings of hopelessness, anger or lack of self-esteem. There were several reasons for non-engagement. Funding was a problem for some and those who were not able to pay for themselves or find the necessary charitable funding could not begin PHDL or, in some cases continue beyond the first funded course (denoted by 'A' on figure 7.1 and 7.2). However, the research was completed at a time of great change in higher education funding and the findings may have been skewed by this. Some participants failed to

start or complete their studies due to administrative or communication issues such as lost assignments or delayed applications (denoted by 'B' in figure 7.1). The contributing factors to these errors were the inadequate infrastructure and poor organisational structures of a 'working' prison and this failure point was not observed in a 'learning' prison.

Agreeing with Belenky and Stanton (2000) and Kegan (2000) the findings suggest that transformative learning is at a later stage of a long developmental process and not everyone was suited to distance learning in prison. Some found that they did not have the necessary skills or mind-set to be able to study alone (denoted by 'C' in figure 7.1 and 7.2). There appeared to be a number of contributing factors to this result which included a lack of good assessment or guidance for learning at induction, a lack of classroom-based education at secondary level (and above) and some participants clearly either lacked some fundamental skills-set or the cognitive ability to do PHDL (see 7.2.2. above). In the latter case, encouraging them to complete PHDL may have been detrimental to their future learning and reduced their confidence and self-esteem.

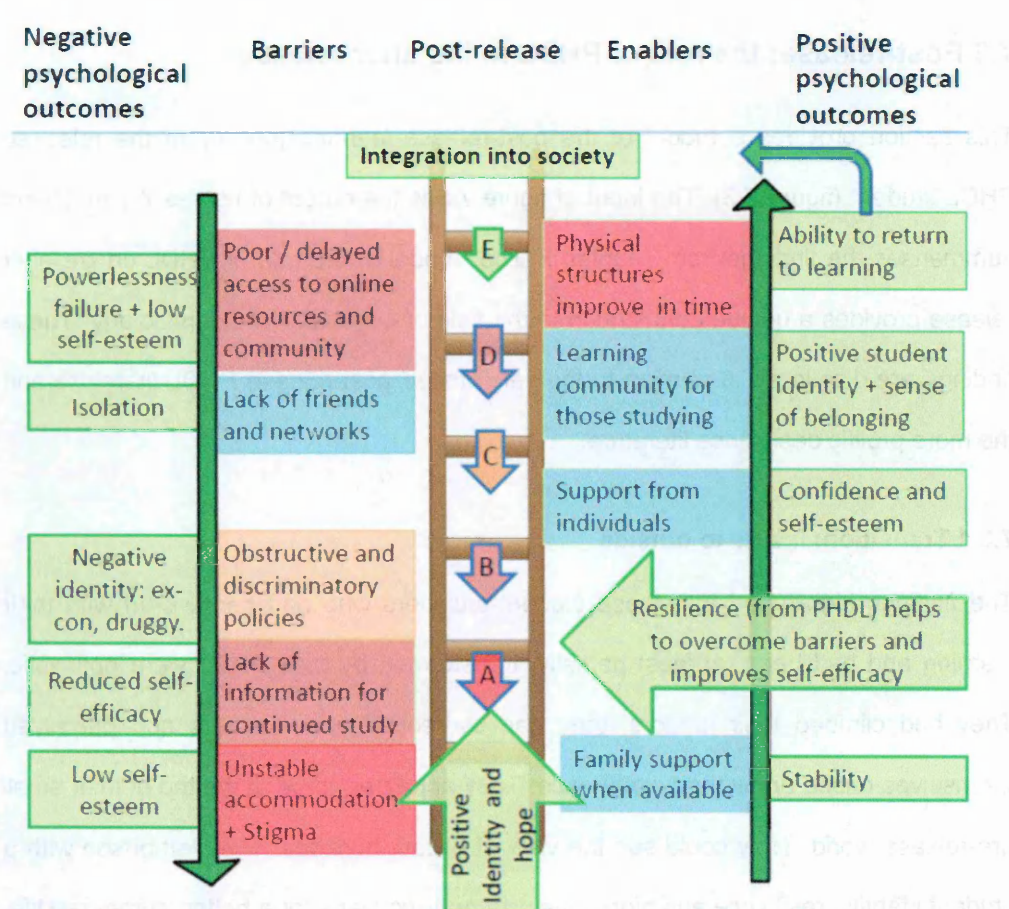
Some participants appeared to have sufficient pre-requisites but failed to fully engage with their studies because they could not find the space, time or inclination to study (denoted by 'D' in figure 7.1 and 7.2). These participants therefore failed because they lacked sufficient social support to overcome the structural barriers to learning as specified above. Only the funding issues were specifically outside of the control of the prison or distance learning organisations. For those participants who failed to engage at 'C' and 'D', it is possible that with more appropriate support at the right times, they could have changed the result. These negative outcomes are consistent with Forster (1976) and suggest that unless PHDL is managed appropriately it could be detrimental to a prisoner's wellbeing.

### **7.3 Post-release: the role of PHDL in life after release**

This section provides a model of the post-release learning journey of the released PHDL student (figure 7.3). The input of figure 7.3 is the output of figures 7.1 or 2, and summarises the findings from chapter 6. The model of the role of PHDL on life after release provides a unique contribution to the field of education and criminology. These findings are discussed in relation to the very limited post-release PHDL literature and the more prolific desistance literature.

#### **7.3.1 Transition: inside to outside**

The findings highlighted that those student-prisoners who had persevered with their learning and had been, at least partially, transformed by their PHDL were optimistic. They had climbed their ladders; they had overcome many barriers and perceived themselves raised up by their experience. They appeared to be at the top of their small pre-release world. They could see the view of distant horizons. They left prison with a student identity, resilience and high hope with realistic plans for a better, crime-free life. As Goffman (1968) puts it, those being released from a total institution are “marvellously alive to the liberties and pleasures of civil status” (p 70), but adjusting to life after prison was difficult. Where there had been structure in the prison, in the immediate post-release environment there was no ordered structure to participants’ lives. With the immense structural barriers to integration which faced them on release, they began to realise that their status within the world was not as they had hoped. There was significant stigmatization which challenged their positive student identity. They found themselves no longer at the top of their pre-prison world with high hope and the view of a brighter horizon, they were instead at the bottom of a much



Key to features:

Failure and recall points		Social support factors	
	Recall due to instability	<b>Structural factors</b> Physical Infrastructural Organisational	
	Failure to start/continue study due lack of information + other priorities		
	Recall due to admin/technicality		
	Failure to pass/engage/complete study due to lack of support/resource	<b>Psychological outcomes</b>	
	Recall due to re-offence		

Figure 7.3 Post release journey to integration



larger post-release world with no status and their horizon was obstructed by the immense challenges ahead. There was a sense of chaos in participants' accounts in the immediate post-release environment and in order to understand their journeys towards post-release integration, it is necessary to be aware of the complex dynamics in that transition period. As all the participants had sentences greater than 1 year, they did not find themselves, as suggested by (Allen and Stern, 2007), destitute and without any destination upon release from prison, as they were under license and had to provide an address. None-the-less the findings highlighted many complex issues which involved finding a better place to live, trying to find employment with a criminal record and a gap in their CV, rebuilding family relationships and becoming a citizen with a formal identity. In addition, those who wanted to continue studying were often under time constraints on their courses so attempting to continue learning added another dimension.

### **7.3.2 Barriers and enablers to post-release integration into society**

There were many structural factors which participants perceived to be affecting their lives at this time, mostly preventing them from making the basic decisions necessary in order to attempt to integrate into society personally, socially and economically. Initially there were the basic physical structures of accommodation and employment. In-prison accommodation, although restricted and sometimes noisy, had been a warm cell with food provided. In contrast, post-release accommodation was unstable and in some cases considered to be unsafe and unhealthy which was inappropriate for learning. In prison, employment had been arranged, often inappropriately with menial tasks but the participant's day was structured, whereas post-release employment was unstable and unstructured. The process of looking for work was far harder than had been anticipated and menial employment replaced the college placements which had not materialised and there was evidence of significant stigma with negative labelling as 'ex-offenders' or 'druggies'. The participants perceived very little social support being offered at this

time, except for family where available and the mentor from a 'learning' prison who did prevent at least one participant from recall. These findings build on those of Aresti et al. (2010) and (Farrall et al., 2010) who have emphasised the damaging effect of these labels but did not link identity changes to levels of education.

Lack of information, communication and technology was seen as another important barrier to reintegration. In prison the infrastructure had varied, there was no Internet but technology was available when necessary. Post-release, the most immediate problem was electronic communication for organising their life which caused a lot of frustration and made reintegrating so much more difficult. Most only had 'pay as you go' text-only mobile phones which made communication with large organisations impossible. Information in prison was lacking, in particular, as discussed above (in 7.2.2), information was lacking when prisoners were due for release. That lack of information, such as who, when or how to contact the distance learning provider about their studies was fundamental, caused significant hardship for participants post-release and was a major cause of course abandonment or failure. These findings extend previous research by Pike and Adams (2012) who suggested that lack of information may be a problem for prisoners on release but did not follow their participants post-release.

Some policies and procedures of relevant organisations, such as the Probation Service, the distance learning providers, as well as colleges, universities and banks were perceived to be extremely unhelpful. They introduced more stigmas and caused barriers to continued study or suitable employment. Probation rules appeared to be particularly unhelpful at times, causing at least one recall to prison through a technicality. This is consistent with the findings of Maguire and Raynor (2006) who suggested less stringent probation conditions for lower risk, and educated, ex-prisoners. Distance learning providers had made an effort to provide a service to their students in prison but the service broke down upon release and providers were

insufficiently responsive to the released students' needs. Delay in acquiring online access to course material was a particularly significant barrier, involving both the distance learning provider and the probation service, reducing potential for community support and leading to course abandonment or failure.

Participants perceived very little support being offered as a matter of policy to mitigate these structural barriers. The main support factor was the participants' own resilience, together with individual staff who worked against the system or carefully selected friends, since old friends and networks were often negative criminal influences to be avoided. However, for the few who successfully managed to continue their studies and eventually acquired online access, the learning community was found to be extremely important. Through belonging to a learning community which was accepted by society, their student identity was confirmed and their integration into society was also therefore confirmed. As time passed, and the physical and infrastructural conditions improved, some participants who had failed to continue their studies initially began to consider studying again and eventually, they too gained the benefits required for improved integration. The resilience was again related to this bounce-back effect. These findings are discussed further below.

### **7.3.3 Psychological outcomes: The personal and social qualities for improved integration in society**

The key positive psychological outcomes from what these findings document (see figure 7.3), are a positive identity, community belonging, self-efficacy and self-esteem. Resilience, which was an outcome from PHDL, enabled participants to better deal with the post-release structural barriers. Hope was mostly maintained but aspirations were often realigned to more realistic outcomes.

### ***Student identity and community belonging***

As reiterated above, the participants' student identity was challenged by the structural barriers but could be maintained by belonging to a learning community whose norms and values were inconsistent with offending behaviour. It is argued here again (see also 7.2.3) that the student identity is not only a personal identity but also a social identity, consistent with Maruna's (2001) 'pro-social identity' which he argues is needed to improve potential for desistance.

It is also argued that continuing to study and belonging to a learning community enabled the learners to cement that personal and social identity, thus developing confidence, self-efficacy and self-esteem which gave them choices and enabled them to effect positive change in their lives. Their social identity shows itself in many ways, for example through the need to give back to society, through generativity. These findings are consistent with Maruna's (2001) narratives of desisters, as care-oriented and generative, but he does not link this to educational attainment.

As discussed in 7.2.3, these findings extend the higher-level prison education literature which identified student identity and suggested potential links to desistance and rehabilitation (Hughes, 2007, 2012; Jupp, 2010; Pike and Adams, 2012). The current longitudinal research confirms such links and provides evidence of how student identity may actually improve potential for integration into society. Cleere (2013) suggested that learning communities and social capital may be important for integration but did not fully investigate identity and post-release issues. The current research therefore builds on Cleere's (2013) findings, confirming the importance of learning communities for developing positive social identity.

The current research findings provide key links between student identity, membership of a learning community and improved integration post-release and extend the findings from the desistance literature. Consistent with Giordano et al. (2002), the positive

social identity from continuing to study post-release could be the “hook for change” which they suggested was related to secondary desistance. Consistent with Farrall et al. (2010), PHDL can be seen as a way of developing social identity which provides the ability to deal with the structures in a post-release social setting. Consistent with Burnett and Maruna (2006), PHDL and the learning community can be seen as a strengths-based intervention, providing prisoners with a student identity which enables them to counteract the negative stigma and enabling them to deal better with their post-release life. The current research findings therefore provide a unique contribution to the UK desistance research literature by linking transformative PHDL, belonging to a learning community and desistance. This also informs recent work by McNeill (2014) regarding the three dimensions of desistance (see 7.4).

### ***Resilience***

Resilience was vitally important as a self-protective factor for students after release and became a key enabler towards integration. Resilience appears to have had three main elements which helped the participants to manage their post-release environment. Firstly it helped them to search out the support they needed, to keep pushing until they received that support which would enable them to continue their education, gain suitable, stable employment or build their status and develop valuable relationships with others. Secondly, resilience helped them to tread water (or stay afloat) until that support arrived, giving them coping strategies and competencies to survive. Thirdly, and most importantly, it stopped them from taking the easy option of going back to prison where life was more structured. These findings add to the literature on resilience, such as Bottrell (2007) and Schoon and Bynner (2003), in highlighting that PHDL can produce the resilience necessary to enable newly released prisoners to adapt to their new surroundings and enable them to cope more readily with the structural conditions in their post-release environment. These findings, once again, also extend the findings of Hughes (2007, 2012) and highlight that, as she had hoped, the

resilience she found in her participants may well have helped them to reintegrate upon release.

### ***Hope***

The present research has shown that transformative PHDL develops high hopes and aspirations which, in many cases, were continued upon release in terms of the perception that the personal goals could be achieved. Consistent with Burnett and Maruna (2004), the hope appeared to improve participants' ability to cope with life after prison and also, when the barriers were too huge in the immediate post-release phase, participants were "overwhelmed by reality" (p 399). Contrary to Burnett and Maruna (2004), hope was not observed to decrease with time although goals were 'adjusted' in face of significant structural barriers. However, they did not consider the effects of learning in their studies and were therefore unaware that learning might affect the levels of hope or indeed whether transformative learning might affect hope's longevity in the face of increased social problems.

### ***Negative outcomes***

As shown in figure 7.3, there were a substantial number of negative outcomes from the structural barriers affecting the released PHDL students which were responsible for a variety of failure points on the post-release journey towards integration. Participants' found their positive student identity being challenged by the significant stigma they encountered and their self-esteem dropped sharply. Some were unable to cope with the unstructured environment and engineered a recall back to a more stable prison environment (Failure point A in Figure 7.3). Lack of resources for learning and communication, and lack of information about how to continue studying, reduced participants' self-efficacy. Most participants failed to continue with their studies and this was a further challenge to their positive student identity (see failure point B in Figure 7.3). Participants felt frustrated and angry at obstructive and discriminatory

organisational policies which caused recall and loss of college or university places with further loss of positive identity (see failure point C in Figure 7.3).

Participants felt neglected, unimportant and powerless by the delays to online access which prevented them from gaining access to their course material or a learning community. They found their student identity being challenged again which reduced self-esteem still further. Many participants failed to continue their studies (see failure point D in figure 7.3). The last failure point in figure 7.3 (point E) is included to acknowledge that some participants who were unable to overcome all these barriers may have returned to crime. There was no direct evidence of this but some traced participants suggested that their resilience was all that had prevent them for returning to crime and it was assumed that those participants who were untraceable were not continuing to study. These findings are a unique contribution to the education literature but build on Farrall (2002) and Maruna (2001) and once again add an educational dimension to the longitudinal desistance literature.

#### **7.4 PHDL as transformation: Integration into society**

This section investigates the role of positive identity and learning community in supporting the PHDL student towards integration into society. A crude comparison between participants' perceptions before and after release (Table 7.1), highlights the discontinuity in psychological outcomes and the potential effects of positive student identity and continued study. A model is proposed in figure 7.4 which suggests how the PHDL students might be helped to overcome the barriers currently preventing them from continuing their learning post-release. It highlights ways in which students could build their positive student identity and be helped to belong to a learning community, thus possibly helping them to integrate more easily into society.

#### **7.4.1 Identifying the temporal effects on identity**

By comparing the participants' perceived structural barriers and psychological outcomes before and after release (Table 7.1), it is not difficult to see why participants had difficulty coping with their learning immediately after release. By investigating the differences in these barriers and outcomes it is possible to identify the main areas of discontinuity of support for newly released students which contributed to their perceived loss of positive student identity, course abandonment or failure and may ultimately have delayed social integration.

This table clearly shows the large differences between the structural barriers and psychological outcomes before and immediately after release. In prison they had a structured physical environment with some good access to technology, a positive student identity where they often felt part of a learning community, had high hopes for success with realistic aspirations. Immediately after leaving prison, they moved into an unstructured environment with poor access to technology with reduced access to a community. Labelled as "ex-cons" or "druggies", some participants perceived a loss to their student identity, lower self-esteem and less hope. Improvements occurred after those first few weeks and months and those improvements were often centred on the potential for continued study. If students were able to continue their studies post-release it built their positive student identity, raised their self-esteem, and sometimes enabled them (eventually) to gain online access to the wider distance learning community which improved feeling of belonging and improved positive student identity still further. So how might they be helped to more easily continue studying and maintaining student identity?



Table 7.1: Comparison of participants' perceptions before and after release

Structural barrier/ Psychological outcomes	In prison	Immediate post-release	Later post-release
Physical structure	Structured: warm cell, work	Unstructured: B&B hostel, no work	Some improvement
Infrastructure	Some good access to technology	Poor access to technology	Some improvement
Organisational structure	'Learning' prison: Good	Obstructive and discriminatory	Mixed
	'Working' prison: Fragmented	Obstructive and discriminatory	Mixed
Identity	Positive student identity	Negative: 'ex-con', 'druggy' labels	Student identity re-builds for those studying
Community belonging	Learning community	Poor access to tutor & community	Improves for those studying
Hope	High	Reduced	Improves for those studying
Self-esteem/ self-efficacy	High/In control	Low/Not in control	Improves for those studying

Note: This table ignores effects of employment on post-release psychological outcomes but they were less consistent with no evidence of relation to learning.

#### 7.4.2 Maintaining student identity: Bridges of support

Figure 7.4 shows the simplified journey from prison to integration. Those PHDL students in prison who persevered with their studies; climbed the mountain towards transformation and were due for release. Some could see the view from the top, broad horizons which they may never have seen before. With raised hopes and realistic aspirations for a crime-free future, they were released. However, as was clearly shown in Table 7.1, the situation immediately post-release was often very different from what they had expected. They fell to the ground and that view of distant horizons was no longer visible. It was obstructed by another mountain range, many more barriers to climb towards integration into society. But was that fall really necessary? What could have prevented it? The present research has found that continued study can improve the potential outcomes so if they could be supported to continue studying then perhaps they would not have fallen so far and their positive student identity may have been maintained.

Figure 7.4 also shows the bridges of support which might improve potential for continued study and make a difference to how far the released student-prisoner falls on release. This could therefore potentially reduce the time for re-orientation of self and ultimately integration into society. These bridges are developed further below and linked to developmental learning:

***Improve initial assessment and guidance for learning:*** Prisoners should be adequately assessed for cognitive ability to ensure that their learning is appropriate for their needs. There should be improved information and guidance for learners which provides them with details of learning opportunities with time for reflection on aspirations.



Figure 7.4: Model of PHDL for successful integration



**More level 3 classroom education and study skills:** More secondary and post-secondary (level 3) classroom education is required which would allow prisoners to continue their learning but not be forced into distance learning until they have developed the necessary attributes for independent study such as self-reflection and autonomy (equivalent to Kegan's (1994) self-authorship stage). More study skills are required such as those already available in some prisons.

**Provide dedicated space for independent learning:** As with a 'learning' prison, and building on Duguid (1981), there should be a dedicated space for PHDL with a 'just' learning community (see 2.6.2) to enable learning and moral development (to Kohlberg's post-conventional level). Technology is needed in that space. Secure Internet access to a larger learning community through the distance learning providers' learning platform would improve potential for continued study. This would also improve tutor communication and positive feedback. Peer support and responsible roles which build self-esteem, self-efficacy and a sense of community should be encouraged in that space.

**Information and guidance for continued PHDL on release:** Students should be informed about who, what, where and how to contact their distance learning providers, post-release. This information would include simple and specific instructions and could even include named individuals.

**Provide practical help for PHDL students on release:** The distance learning provider policies and procedures for ex-prisoner students to access their study materials, tutors and the larger learning community should be reviewed. It should also be recognised that ex-prisoner students may have severe hardships and should be provided with additional support initially. Communication through text should be an option made available by distance learning providers.

### ***Encourage and support PHDL learners to become part of a learning community:***

As has already been shown, the link with the distance learning community is very important. If that link could be improved throughout the whole learning journey then continued learning post-release may follow.

#### **7.4.3 Links to desistance**

It should be noted that it is not possible to discuss the desistance of single time offenders (Maruna, 2001), so in discussing desistance it is necessary to focus on that group of students in the present research who were socially disadvantaged and had been in the criminal justice system for some time.

The Government's transforming rehabilitation evidence summary (Ministry of Justice, 2013b) highlights nine desistance factors which help individuals desist from crime, and this thesis suggests that the benefits from PHDL may improve all nine of those factors. Transformative PHDL produced a positive student identity which is both a personal and a social identity. It was also found that this developed further by belonging to a learning community. However, there were many other benefits of PHDL from the informative learning which provided benefits such as subject-specific knowledge and the confidence and skills developed through independent learning. These increased participants' self-efficacy and enabled them to take control of their lives.

McNeill (2014) suggested three levels of desistance (see 2.4.2): primary-level desistance involves a behaviour change and may only be temporary; secondary-level desistance involves a change in identity; tertiary-level desistance requires the sharing of values from belonging to a community which is accepted by society. The present research suggests that, in line with Kegan (2000), PHDL's informative learning which builds confidence and self-efficacy could be linked to primary desistance. Transformative PHDL, that is the learning which develops a positive personal and social identity, could lead to secondary level desistance. However, when the student

continues to learn post-release and belongs to a learning community, or other such socially acceptable community, that could lead to tertiary-level desistance.

The current research adds an educational dimension to desistance theory, building on McNeill (2014) who has only recently proposed the possibility of tertiary level desistance. The current research also adds more detail to Cleere's (2013) suggestion that prison education developed social capital and could link to desistance. Further research could re-analyse longitudinal data from researchers such as Farrall (2002) which has not yet been investigated through the lens of learning, identity and community.

Additionally, the current findings could help to confirm the four quadrants of integration proposed by McNeill and Weaver (2010) since personal integration is linked to cognitive development and therefore informative learning and primary desistance. Social integration is related to social identity and responsibility and could therefore be linked to transformative learning and secondary desistance. Judicial integration is linked to formal de-labelling and could be fulfilment of education such as a graduation (see for example Doug's comments in 6.3.3). Finally moral integration is linked to awareness-raising and a moral code which could be the continuing student who follows the learning path and is more readily accepted by society.

## **7.5 Chapter conclusions**

This thesis has investigated the role of prison-based higher-level distance learning for prisoners on release. The findings have been presented in a series of diagrammatic models which are discussed in relation to the theoretical and empirical research literature. They show that PHDL can transform learners and equip them with the personal and social attributes to better integrate into society. However the success of their learning journey was dependent on the physical, infrastructural and organisational

structural barriers in the prison and the post-release environments. These structural barriers were mediated by social support from family, friends, individuals in organisations and a learning community.

Within the prison, when the structural and the social support factors interacted positively they led towards the key psychological outcomes relevant to personal and social change and transformative learning. These outcomes were positive student identity, resilience and high hope which translated into realistic aspirations for future life chances. However, when the social support factors were unable to satisfactorily mediate the structural factors, the resultant psychological outcomes were pre-release anxieties and led to failure or abandonment of the course and a less positive identity. The prison context greatly affected outcomes and findings are presented for both a 'working' and a 'learning' prison (see figures 7.1 and 7.2)

The psychological outcomes from transformative learning of positive student identity, resilience and hope (above), were positive qualities required to equip the learners to manage life after prison. However, in the post-release environment there were many further structural barriers affecting the released students which were again mediated by the, rather limited, social support and the students' own resilience. When these factors interacted positively and study continued, the resultant psychological outcomes were a strong positive student identity (personal and social), raised self-esteem and greater control. There was therefore more successful integration into society and potentially long-term desistance from crime. When the social support factors were unable to satisfactorily mediate the structural factors, the negative psychological outcomes were reduced self-esteem, reduced self-efficacy and failure to continue studying. There was loss of the positive student identity with less option for community membership, reduced self-esteem and potentially delayed integration into society (see figure 7.3).

The resultant models of transformative PHDL and its role in life after prison which answer the research questions extend the findings of Costelloe (2003), Hughes (2012), Jupp (2010) and Pike and Adams (2012) by providing detail of how PHDL can be transformative. They show that after release, PHDL can lead to improved integration into society and hence potentially contribute to desistance from crime. The findings provide details about the circumstances in which the PHDL can be optimised to improve its transformative potential and how the structural and the social support factors lead towards integration into society.

Additional diagrammatic models provide more detail about how the key barriers affect the psychological outcomes, the transformative quality of the learning and therefore the potential for successful integration into society (see table 7.1). Solutions to these barriers are offered in the form of bridges which would improve potential for student-prisoners to successfully continue their learning journeys, hold onto their student identity and retain membership of a learning community (see figure 7.4). These bridges include the initial assessment of learning and more classroom education opportunities which span the gap between basic education and PHDL to help to ensure that learners acquire the necessary attributes for independent learning. They include dedicated, technology-enabled space for independent learning in prison which has been shown to improve learners' student identity and chances of success. They include improvements to information and guidance before and after release to enable continued study post-release which has been shown to increase the potential for successful integration into society.

This chapter has proposed links between transformative PHDL and improved integration into society with the potential for desistance. The models of transformative learning in prison and the route through to integration suggest that transformative PHDL is a developmental process which reaches varying levels up to a full



transformation. That transformation involves a shift in the learners' frame of reference, involving the development of a new, positive personal and social identity. The student's journeys are depicted as climbing up ladders in figures 7.1 to 7.4 to indicate this developmental process as well as highlight the difficulty in overcoming the barriers which push them downwards. However it is also seen that transformative learning is part of a longer developmental journey and cannot begin until the learner has reached the required cognitive and moral developmental stage. Therefore, it could be argued that, learning in prison should be properly managed to develop the whole person and enable learners to progress through the required developmental stages.



## **Chapter 8: Conclusions**

### **8.1 Overview of the research**

The aim of this thesis was to investigate how Prison-based Higher-level Distance Learning (PHDL) is transformative and in what ways it prepares prisoners for integration into society on release. Previous research had suggested that PHDL was potentially transformative as it led to increased confidence and social skills as well as hope and aspirations for better lives on release. There was, however, a lack of detail as to how the learning might be transformative and, although it was suggested that the benefits may improve chances of rehabilitation after prison, there was a lack of understanding as to how prisoners' learning affected their post-release lives. In particular there was no known longitudinal study in England and Wales which had investigated whether PHDL actually made a difference to its learners' lives on release from prison. Therefore, the findings from the research presented in this thesis are a unique contribution to the field of education, and as the first longitudinal study of released prisoners in England and Wales that has focused on higher-level learning, has a potential impact on other disciplines such as criminology.

A qualitative, ethnographic and longitudinal approach was taken, with an emphasis on the participants as individuals with their own unique narrative. The data was led by in-depth semi-structured interviews to collect rich descriptions of student-prisoners', potentially transformative, learning journeys and to establish the role of PHDL in managing life after prison. The data was collected in three separate phases, each with its own permissions process and analysis. Initially, in the pilot phase, ten ex-prisoners were interviewed. They had completed PHDL from between 6 months and 10 years previously and perceived themselves to be integrating back into society with varying

levels of success. They had experience of the resettlement process and perceptions of the barriers facing ex-prisoners on release.

Early findings from this pilot phase fed into the rest of the data collection process. The second, in-prison, phase involved interviewing 51 prisoners, due for release from 10 prisons across England and Wales; almost a quarter of this group had not engaged with their studies and so formed a comparison group. The third, post-release, phase involved tracing and re-interviewing the participants after release. Ultimately 38 of the original in-prison participants were included in the post-release phase, 28 were traced after release and 25 were re-interviewed up to six times during the following year, generating unique longitudinal data. The interview data were backed up with field notes, observations and informal conversations with educators, prison and probation staff, family and peers.

Thematic analysis of the data was a continuous process and the in-prison and post-release data collection phases ran in parallel so it was possible to investigate some of the issues emerging during further data collection, to improve validity. There were three key themes to emerge from the analysis: the structural factors, mostly barriers to learning; the social support factors, mostly mediated the structural barriers; the psychological outcomes which were the result of the interaction of the structural and social support factors acting on the participants. The findings were separated into in-prison and post-release, highlighting the different data collection methods and the very different contexts.

#### **8.1.1 In-prison findings and implications for policy and practice**

The in-prison findings built on the previous, MRes, research and confirmed the wide variety of support for PHDL across different prisons. The concept of a 'working' or a

‘learning’ prison, as two ends of a whole spectrum of different prison environments, was therefore further developed. As has been previously stated (see 2.6.3 and 4.2.2), these concepts were used to describe the differences in support for PHDL. In reality, prisons are very complex environments. The prisons may have exhibited some or many of these ‘working’ or ‘learning’ features but that did not suggest that the prisons were either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ since other aspects of these prisons have not been highlighted.

A ‘working’ prison had fragmented organizational structures and a working culture, with little space or time for learning, whereas a ‘learning’ prison had a learning culture in which distance learners perceived their own learning community with dedicated space and time to work. The majority of prisons in this research were at the ‘working’ end of the spectrum. Participants perceived that support for PHDL in these prisons came mostly from a few dedicated individuals who bent the rules in order to help them. Some prisoners fell by the wayside. Many felt isolated and struggled to find the conditions in which they could complete their assignments and some lacked the skills or cognitive abilities to be able to study independently. There were fewer prisons at the ‘learning’ end of the spectrum but there was one particular prison which provided particularly good support for PHDL, where participants felt valued (see Box 8.1).

**Good Practice example of a ‘learning’ prison:** Prison P provided space and time for independent learning which enabled a community to develop. The learning journey started with a well-structured induction with adequate information for learners to develop a learning plan towards their goals, which was incorporated into their sentence plan so that other departments in the prison were aware of their learning. Good, accessible, resources supported learning and then, as release approached, they were provided with sufficient information and encouraged to make the necessary applications to college or to continue with their distance learning courses. The organisational structure was such that the resettlement staff worked closely with the

education staff, towards one goal which was student-centred. Staff were seconded into the distance-learning department for their knowledge of specific areas of the prison and post-prison environment, so that the whole learning journey could be managed more easily. PHDL students were encouraged to apply for responsible positions as peer mentors for which they were interested and suitable. These roles helped to build self-esteem and confidence, and developed personal and social identity in preparation for release. Finally they were often supported by mentors upon release. These were seconded prison staff, who worked with a small number of ex-prisoners, giving them additional support when they needed it. Under these circumstances, participants thrived, were directed towards successful, transformative learning with high hopes and aspirations for a better future.

#### **Box 8.1: Good practice example of a 'learning' prison**

Across all prison types, those participants who persevered with their learning were, at least partially, transformed. They developed a strong positive personal and social identity with hope and realistic aspirations for their future after release. They also developed resilience, by overcoming the barriers to distance-learning in a prison environment. These findings extend the previous literature regarding higher-level distance learning in prison, by providing details of how PHDL can be transformative, how the student-prisoners develop a positive student identity, and the importance of a learning community.

The models of transformative PHDL, which answer the first research question, confirm and extend those of other researchers (Costelloe, 2003; Hughes, 2012; Jupp, 2010; Pike and Adams, 2012), by providing evidence of how PHDL can be transformative. The findings provide unique details about the circumstances in which the PHDL can be optimised to improve its transformative potential and how the structural and the support factors differ from a 'working' to a 'learning' prison.

The model of the students' learning journey, in both a 'working' and 'learning' prison (Figures 7.1.and 7.2), are unique contributions to the literature and provide some new and interesting findings regarding the barriers and support for PHDL. These are highlighted below with associated implications for policy and practice.

### ***Insufficient assessment, guidance and preparation for PHDL***

Some participants were encouraged into distance learning without adequate cognitive development of reflective and independent learning skills. There were three particular contributory factors to this finding. There was a lack of effective assessment for learning at induction, a lack of information and preparation for independent study, and a lack of third level classroom-based courses which could bridge the gap between current classroom provision and higher-level distance learning. These findings suggest that prisons should improve their induction with better assessment, information and guidance to ensure learning is more effective. The findings also suggest that learning should be more individualised as in the 'learning' prison good practice example (see Box 8.1 above). Some study skills sessions has been trialled by one distance learning provider and the findings confirm that such sessions should be encouraged and extended. The lack of third level study options has been recognised by other researchers (Hurry et al., 2012; Wilson, 2010) and perhaps the current findings will add weight to a call for further funds from government to be made available or a re-distribution of current funds by the Skills Funding Agency. In the current economic climate the likelihood of further funding becoming available is slim, so in the short term, perhaps more PHDL students could be encouraged and trained in mentoring and teaching assistant positions which support the weaker learners. This would be relatively simple and would work towards improving the situation around student identity and learning communities in prison, as described in the next paragraph.

### ***The importance of student identity and a learning community***

A positive student identity and a learning community were found to be very important elements of transformative learning but this finding also highlighted the differences between a 'working' and 'learning' prison. The 'learning' prison example (in Box 8.1) has shown that a dedicated learning space for PHDL, with students given responsibility to run their own classes and reduced input from teachers and security staff, can work well and builds a learning community. Even those prisons with relatively few higher-level learners could do more to provide learning space with technology. If PHDL students could be encouraged to take more responsible roles and help less able students, instead of undertaking menial work in prison industry, there would be benefits across the prison (as stated above). The other good practice (see Box 8.1) of opening up libraries and technology rooms on an evening or weekend for those students who work all day is also a simple solution.

### ***Lack of information on release***

The lack of information for participants to be able to continue their studies on release caused significant anxiety and major implications post-release. Information is not expensive but it does require some organisation and a joined-up approach to resettlement, involving the prison, the education provider and the distance learning provider. This partially relates again to induction, but particularly induction in the open prison and the students themselves have suggested improvements (in 6.4). This recommendation could be specifically aimed towards resettlement prisons which are currently being developed in the government's rehabilitation agenda.

If, as in the 'learning' prison (see Box 8.1 above), the student's aspiration for release guides their learning plan, which is linked to their sentence plan, then perhaps learning would feature more highly in the release process and continuation of learning would become a priority. The distance-learning providers, such as the Open University, the



National Extension College and the Open College of the Arts, should also improve their information to students due for release, with easy to read information packs. This does, of course, require the distance-learning providers to know when the student is due to be released which requires a change in policy whereby the student's release date is provided at registration. A better dialogue between the prison and the distance learning provider would also allow changes in circumstance to be highlighted more easily. The Virtual Campus was designed to have a 'through the gate' capability which allows prisoners to access their in-prison study material from any online computer after release. However, as this research shows that the Virtual Campus has not been effectively used for PHDL, and participants were not aware of this capability, there is still some way to go before the Virtual Campus can be fully utilised.

Many of these recommendations merely constitute individualised learning, leading towards a supportive environment which encourages transformative learning and a 'learning' prison was highlighted as exceptionally good practice (see Box 8.1). However, individualised learning requires prisoners to be viewed as individual citizens with a mind and a future, whereas many of the participants perceived themselves to be viewed as an object, an offender, a number. There is therefore potential for improvement in how prisoners are perceived by all stakeholders.

#### **8.1.2 Post-release findings and implications for policy and practice**

Life was chaotic for all the participants in the early weeks and months after release and they faced immense barriers to integration. Accommodation was unstable and inappropriate for learning. Those with families often had greater stability and a mentor was also found to successfully provide vital support. Employment was mostly menial and far from what they had anticipated. Planned college and university places failed to materialise and there was discrimination from most organisations with negative labels challenging the positive student identity with which participants had left prison, raising

barriers to continued study or employment. Lack of money and lack of technology led to frustration and communication issues. Online access to course material took a long time and was poorly organised. Participants felt neglected and powerless, with low self-esteem and many failed to continue their studies. There was very little support offered and the participants' resilience and hopes were often all that prevented some from returning to prison. However, those participants who were employed through Release on Temporary License (RoTL) schemes with good practice employers felt well-supported in a working community and appeared to successfully integrate into society.

The few participants who were able to continue learning after release maintained their positive student identity, benefitted from belonging to a learning community and integrated more successfully into society. As this was the first longitudinal study of PHDL students in the UK, these findings are an original contribution to the education literature and add an educational dimension to the longitudinal desistance literature. The model of a learner's journey from prison to integration into society (Figure 7.3), the model of transition (Table 7.1) and the bridges of support (Figure 7.4) together answer the second research question. These models are also an original contribution to the field, confirming and extending previous research (Costelloe, 2003; Hughes, 2012; Jupp, 2010; Pike and Adams, 2012) by showing that after release, PHDL can lead to improved integration into society and potentially contribute to desistance from crime. They provide unique details about the circumstances in which the PHDL can be optimised to reduce structural barriers and improve social support factors, leading towards more successful integration into society. These findings are summarised below, with their implications for policy and practice.

### ***Positive identity and a learning community improve integration into society***

This is the key finding from the research. It builds on the findings of Farrall and Calverley (2006) about positive non-learning communities which have been recognised

by the Ministry of Justice (2013b) as helping desistance. Hence, these findings could encourage the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to give higher priority to PHDL or encourage the department of Business Innovation and Skills to provide more funding for PHDL.

Continued learning was clearly difficult for participants immediately post-release but continued learning is not the only way for ex-prisoners to maintain their positive personal and social identity. For example, the alumni section of Prisoners Education Trust provides a positive learning community for those ex-prisoners who have benefitted from their funding. Similarly, distance learning providers have an alumni section which could be better utilised. There are numerous other third sector organisations which can provide the necessary community, such as Only Connect, a crime prevention charity providing training and support for ex-prisoners at risk of offending, or religious organisations which some participants in the current research have found so supportive.

These findings could encourage policy-makers to help released student-prisoners to keep their positive identity. There are many ways in which this could be done. For example, more information to student-prisoners due for release would improve immediate contact with distance learning providers, colleges and universities. Also, improved communication and coordination between the Prison Service, the education provider and the Probation Service could enable immediate access to online learning material and tutors, unless there are specific license restrictions to prevent it. If distance learning providers were more aware of the difficulties for their students who are newly released from prison on license, they could improve their procedures to be more pro-active in contacting them, ensuring that they are not left without support for long periods. Distance learning tutors may require training to ensure they are fully aware of the resettlement process and difficulties facing newly released prisoners so they are better able to support them. An understanding of the importance of belonging

to a community would also clarify the tutors' role in helping ex-prisoners to be better included in that community.

Mentoring has been recognised by numerous other researchers as an important means of supporting ex-prisoners. However, the finding that responsible positions in prison, such as peer-mentoring, can improve positive identity is not so well recognised. There is therefore a need for better coordination between distance learning providers, the Prison Service, the Probation Service and the voluntary sector organisations which support ex-prisoners, to allow PHDL students to be more readily trained as mentors and other responsible positions.

### ***Qualities developed through PHDL can improve integration into society***

Those participants who had engaged with their studies in prison and had, at least partially, been transformed by their learning developed hope and resilience which was found to help them to manage life better after release, and to integrate better into society.

The finding that higher levels of hope were related to more successful integration into society, adds an educational dimension to the findings of Burnett and Maruna (2004) which highlighted the importance of hope for desistance. Hope has also been recognised by the MoJ (2013b) as a key factor in desistance. Policies should be encouraged, which enable ex-prisoners to maintain that hope. An example is again related to the induction and release information, by ensuring that hopes and aspirations are adequately recorded and 'listened to' in the prison, agreeing with Reuss and Wilson's (2000) first step forward "to listen to prisoners" (p.175). Another example relates to the policies of colleges and universities that were identified in this research as rejecting ex-prisoners. There are universities that already support ex-prisoner applications and could be ambassadors in this process.

Resilience, which participants developed through overcoming the barriers to PHDL, was found to enable participants to overcome post-release barriers and therefore also improved potential for social integration. At first glance this suggests that PHDL should be made as difficult as possible to build up resilience, but the research also finds that those barriers to studying in prison are already high enough, even in a 'learning' prison. What this finding does suggest however, is that better support is required for student-prisoners post-release, so they do not have to rely solely on their resilience. Some potential improvements to in-prison support have already been discussed above.

Finally, many of those who engaged in PHDL perceived that they had matured through their learning. This was an interesting finding as ageing and maturation is recognised by MoJ (2013b) as a key factor for desistance and so suggests that PHDL may speed up the desistance process. This could be another argument for increasing participation and funding for PHDL.

## **8.2 Limitations of the research with suggestions for further research**

Reflecting on the research process, there were several limitations. These are discussed below, with ideas for how the limitation could be ameliorated and suggestions for further research. Initially, there were a number of methodological limitations. For example, to attempt ethnographic research across eight (and ultimately ten) prisons was, at best, unrealistic. Even though there were multiple visits to some prisons with much ethnographic data gathered, there was not enough time to get a real 'feel' for the context. As stated in chapter 4, the number of prisons was dependent on the number of participants in each prison and ultimately some prisons only had two or three participants. Despite much effort to select prisons with 'good practice' in PHDL, many of the prisons were found to be at the 'working' end of the spectrum and had very little support for PHDL so the good practice criteria appeared to have been unsuccessful. In future research, it may be better to concentrate less on 'good practice'

and wholly on finding two or three prisons containing more participants, allowing for a deeper ethnography. More time in the prison would also enable 'lost' participants to be found and may enable some access to the cells where much of the learning goes on. This would all help to investigate further the informal networks or communities which may develop on the wing and elsewhere in the prison, especially as the majority of the prisons currently have no other space for distance learning.

There was a lack of demographic information for participants. This meant that it was not possible to fully analyse how previous characteristics had an effect on learning and future life chances. For example, ethnicity and previous cultural background was not adequately identified or investigated so it is not known how these may have affected findings. Also, participants' previous education in the prison system was not adequately detailed so it was difficult to identify progression made in the prison. When comparing those who succeeded in their studies and those who did not, it would have been helpful to know who had completed education successfully on a previous sentence and who had not.

By concentrating on their education and not their crimes, there was no attempt to identify what crimes they had committed (except to exclude certain types of criminal such as sex offenders and life sentences on the grounds of complex resettlement procedures). Some information became available during interview and was recorded, but fuller information would have made it easier to understand some of the participants' comments and improve analysis of how their learning related to desistance. For example, the number of previous sentences was identified but there was insufficient detail about other dealings with the criminal justice system and, except where the participant volunteered the information, it was difficult to identify who was a first time offender and who was not. Comparing the present research with other longitudinal (desistance) studies was hence more difficult.

Further research should consider including an initial survey to a larger sample which investigates participant characteristics such as family history, children, ethnicity, cultural background, offending background and criminal justice involvement. For example it could enquire about the number of sentences, age first in the criminal justice system, sentencing information, age when education was first considered in prison and number and type of courses completed in prison (including success and failure). This information would aid analysis and enable transformative learning to be better identified. As only 38 of the original 51 in-prison participants were in scope, due mostly to inappropriate release dates, a survey of this kind would also improve sampling by identifying participants with appropriate release dates.

The comparison group was ultimately too small to allow post-release comparison. It had not been possible to find enough non-engaged participants and it was hoped that 20% would be sufficient. However, as most of the non-engaged (DNE) participants were either not traced or did not want to participate in the study post-release, comparable findings were limited. Future research could consider a different comparison group, such as distance learning students (not in prison) with previous disadvantage and possibly some kind of trauma in their lives. This could highlight if the trauma of release was a comparable factor and show more clearly how the resilience developed through PHDL affected their ability to bounce back.

There was a limited amount of information about the post-release environment. Post-release interviews were mostly telephone interviews. This was a decision made with due consideration to risks, time and costs as well as the success of the pilot interviews and did probably enable more participants to be interviewed. However, there were numerous occasions where a face-to-face visit with the participant would have added an additional perspective on surrounding situation such as living conditions, health and wellbeing and relationships with others. In future research, at least one face-to-face

interview after release should be attempted and an effort should be made to see the participant's living environment.

Due to the PhD training constraints and delays in permission, there was only one year available for the post-release phase. This was not long enough to adequately identify if the proposed benefits of PHDL can be maintained in the longer term. Further research is required which builds on these findings and investigates if the benefits of PHDL can be maintained in the longer term. As in Farrall's (2002) study and Farrall and Calverley (2006), the participants could also be interviewed more consistently at fixed intervals to make more detailed comparisons over time.

The findings are based on participants' perceptions that their PHDL had changed their views and developed their student identity. However, their accounts may not have accurately reflected the changes that occurred. They may not even have known when they developed their student identity. Transformative learning is likely to be a later stage of a much longer learning journey and it is difficult to interpret where on their journey they changed their views of their world, or indeed where they were on their learning journey. Certainly these findings agree with Alden (2013) who suggested that university students develop a student identity after their first undergraduate course. However, there was not always full information about previous lower level courses studied, and apart from the Open University students, the exact subject matter was not known either. Hence, it was not possible to analyse whether transformative learning and development of student identity was related to particular courses, as might be suggested by Crewe et al. (2014). Different subjects would also bring in tutor contact and a myriad of other factors. Further research could focus on specific factors such as level of study, subjects studied, and tutor feedback, to identify the most relevant factors affecting students' perceptions of transformation and student identity.



The findings would also suggest that participants developed social capital (see Appendix A) through belonging to a learning community and developing a positive personal and social identity. However, the research did not focus on social capital and did not measure it in any way. It is therefore not possible to confirm or extend those findings of Cleere (2013) which link prison education, social capital and desistance. Further research could focus on social capital and investigate the links between belonging to a learning community, student identity, social capital and desistance.

Finally, although reflexivity was woven into the whole research process, there were several points at which I became overly involved in the research process and, although this was clearly considered during analysis, it may have affected findings. For example, the later in-prison interviews were conducted with knowledge of the early post-release finding that there was insufficient information for participants to continue their studies. Where it was obvious that a participant was due for release without the necessary information, I provided additional information which may have helped the participant to complete the process, such as the name and telephone number of a knowledgeable member of the distance-learning staff (see, for example, Andrew in chapter 5 and 6). Sometimes, the participants were just warned of the potential barriers they might face, so they were better prepared, although this did not obviously overcome the immense barriers they perceived post-release, and therefore did not necessarily enable continued study.

Also, during the post-release phase, it was occasionally necessary to pass on information in text messages received from those participants who had no phone credits. For example, this text from Brian who wished to start studying again,

*Hi I wondered if it wud b possible 2 leave a msg with [regional staff] 2 ring me as I'm stuck on the financial forms. Sorry to keep textin. Thanks [Brian]*

In this case, the information was passed to distance-learning provider staff who contacted him. It is worth noting that had I not been there, it is highly unlikely that Brian would have continued studying as contacting the distance learning provider was just too difficult. This does, however, pose the question of how many other prisoners discontinued their studies for similar reasons. These are ethical considerations and are discussed further in 8.3 below.

### **8.3 Personal reflection: what I have learned from the research process**

As stated in chapter 1, I started this research journey because I wanted to find out how students in prison were transformed by their learning and whether it made a difference to them on release. The research process itself was interesting and even exciting at times. The findings from the in-prison phase were a little depressing, in that support for PHDL, and especially the access to technology, had mostly deteriorated from previous research. However, the findings from the post-release, longitudinal, phase were worse. I had, of course, read much about some of the problems facing ex-prisoners, but seeing and hearing about the discrimination they initially faced was truly shocking.

I add now a little about my own learning journey which is not so very different from some of my participants. No, I have not been to prison but that does not mean I have not made mistakes in my youth and had to readjust my life trajectory occasionally. I left school at 16 with very little to show for being an 'A-grade student' and had a colourful few years before returning to education in my mid-20s. Therefore, I empathised with my participants. I found myself becoming more and more drawn into the lives of several of the more needy participants. As discussed above, I passed on messages or chased distance learning staff on behalf of my participants. I even went as far as ringing up a university dean to ask him to reconsider taking Nina back for her final year (which he

did). This, of course, raised many ethical issues with which I have struggled, and discussed with others, who were more experienced in such matters. With regard to the intervention however, I am ultimately guided by the person in the mirror and if I had to do it again, would I? Yes I would.

Once I would have thought no more about the person in the mirror but I have recently had to reassess. I realise that that person is not the same person who started this research. That person is now much more reflective and sees things in a different way. For example, on returning to my literature review while writing chapter 7, I was infuriated with myself for not reading the literature properly the first time around as I had clearly missed the main points of the papers. At first I thought I must have read the papers badly and made poor notes, and that may have been partially true, but I began to realise that I was now reading them from a different perspective, from a different frame of reference, which highlighted different points from the papers. So I too have been transformed by my learning journey.

## **8.4 Final thoughts**

This thesis has presented findings which emphasise the importance of a learning community inside and outside of prison. The research has also emphasised that developing resilience, hope and a positive identity may help to overcome the barriers to being accepted by society on release. In particular, it has been found that continuing to belong to a learning community was important for maintaining that positive identity, staying more hopeful, and being better placed to fully integrate into society as a citizen.

At this point I would like to return to Wenger (1998) who said,

*...learning communities cannot be isolated. They must use the world around them as a learning resource and be a learning resource for the world.*

I am sure Wenger did not have a learning community of prisoners or ex-prisoners in mind when he wrote this but I think it is rather apt. The world needs to change, not just the (ex-)prisoners in their communities. This thesis has provided some important understanding of the circumstances and experiences of prisoners studying in prison and their fortunes on release. It suggests that, when given the opportunity, many ex-prisoners want to lead a better life free from crime. They should be allowed another chance to live that life in society. The world needs to learn how to change in order to accept that.

## REFERENCES

- Adams, A. & Cox, A. L. (2008) Questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focus groups. *In: Cairns, P. & Cox, A. L. (ed.) Research Methods for Human-Computer Interaction*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Adams, A., Lunt, P. & Cairns, P. (2008) A qualitative approach to HCI research. *In: Cairns, P. & Cox, A. L. (ed.) Research methods for human-computer interaction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Adams, A. & Pike, A. (2008a) *Evaluating empowerment and control of HE e-learning in a secure environment*, Presented at BERA conference. Edinburgh.
- Adams, A. & Pike, A. (2008b) *Security issues within prison and health ODL programmes*, 5th Pan-Commonwealth Forum on open learning (PCF5). London: Commonwealth of Learning.
- Alden, B. (2013) *Distance learners conceptions' of reflection in higher education*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Open University.
- Allen, R. & Stern, V. (2007) *Justice Reinvestment - A new approach to crime and justice*. London: International Centre for Prison Studies, Kings College London.
- Andrews, D. A., Bonta, J. & Wormith, J. S. (2011) The Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model: Does adding the Good Lives Model contribute to effective crime prevention? *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 38(7), 735-755.
- Antaki, C., Billig, M., Edwards, D. & Potter, J. (2002) Discourse analysis means doing analysis: A critique of six analytic shortcomings. *Discourse Analysis Online* [Online], 1. Available: <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ss/centres/dargindex.htm>.
- Aos, S., Miller, M. & E., D. (2006) *Evidence-based adult corrections programs: What works and what does not*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.
- Aresti, A., Eatough, V. & Brooks-Gordon, B. (2010) Doing time after time: an Interpretative Phenomenological analysis of reformed ex-prisoners' experiences of self-change, identity and career opportunities. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 16(3), 169-190.

- Atkinson, P. & Hammersley, M. (1994) Ethnography and participant observation. *In: Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (ed.) Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Bandura, A. (1977) Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191-215.
- Barber, J. P., King, P. M. & Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2013) Longstrides on the journey towards self-authorship: Substantial Developmental Shifts in College Students' Meaning Making. *Journal of Higher Education*, 84(6), 866-896.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2004) Evolution of a constructivist conceptualization of epistemological reflection. *Educational Psychologist*, 39, 31-42.
- Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R. & Tarule, J. M. (1986) *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice and mind*, New York: Basic Books Inc.
- Belenky, M. F. & Stanton, A. V. (2000) Inequality, development and connected knowing. *In: Mezirow and Associates (ed.) Learning as transformation: critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Berman, G. (2012) *Prison population statistics*. London: House of Commons Library.
- Blaxter, L., Hughes, C. & Tight, M. (2006) *How to research*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Bloomer, M. (2001) Young Lives, learning and transformation: some theoretical considerations *Oxford Review of Education*, 27(3), 429-449.
- Bottoms, A., Shapland, J., Costello, A., Holmes, D. & Muir, G. (2004) Towards desistance: Theoretical underpinnings for an empirical study. *The Howard Journal* 43(4), 368-389.
- Bottrell, D. (2007) Resistance, resilience and social identities: Reframing 'Problem Youth' and the problem of schooling. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 10(5), 597-616.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a theory of practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1985) The forms of capital. *In: Richardson, J. G. (ed.) Handbook of theory and research of the sociology of education*. New York: Greenwood.

- Braggins, J. & Talbot, J. (2003) *Time to learn: Prisoners' views on prison education* London: Prison Reform Trust.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Briggs, C. L. (2002) Interviewing power, knowledge and social inequality. In: Gubrium, J. F. & Holstein, J. A. (ed.) *Handbook of interview research* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Brockett, R. G. & Hiemstra, R. (1985) Bridging the theory-practice gap in self-directed learning. In: Brookfield, S. (ed.) *Self-directed learning from theory to practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Brookfield, S. D. (1985) Self-directed learning: a critical review of research. In: Brookfield, S. (ed.) *Self-directed learning: from theory to practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Brookfield, S. D. (1986) *Understanding and facilitating adult learning : A comprehensive analysis of principles and effective practices* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Brookfield, S. D. (1998) Understanding and facilitating moral learning in adults. *Journal of Moral Education*, 27(3), 283-300.
- Brookfield, S. D. (2000) Transformative learning as ideology critique. In: Associates, J. M. (ed.) *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Brookfield, S. D. (2005) *The power of critical theory for adult learning and teaching*, Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Burgess, R. G. (1984) *In the field: an introduction to field research*, London: Allen and Unwin.
- Burnett, R. (1992) *The dynamics of recidivism*, Oxford: Centre for Criminological Research.
- Burnett, R. & Maruna, S. (2004) So prison works, does it? The criminal careers of 130 men released from prison under home secretary Michael Howard. *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 33(4), 390-404.
- Burnett, R. & Maruna, S. (2006) The kindness of prisoners Strengths-based resettlement in theory and in action. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 6(1), 83-106.

- Bynner, J. (2009) *Lifelong Learning and Crime: A Life-course perspective*, Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning. Leicester: NIACE.
- Carlsmith, K. M. (2006) The roles of retribution and utility in determining punishment. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 42(4), 437-451.
- Chené, A. (1983) The concept of autonomy in adult education: a philosophical discussion. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 34(1), 38-47.
- Clark, J. (2006) Perspectives of enhanced thinking skills in prison. *The British Journal of Forensic Practice*, 8(1), 12-23.
- Clarke, V. & Braun, V. (2013) Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. . *The Psychologist*, 26(2), 120-123.
- Cleere, G. (2013) *Prison education, social capital and desistance: An exploration of prisoner experiences in Ireland*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Waterford Institute of Technology.
- Corden, A. & Millar, J. (2007) Qualitative longitudinal research for social policy - Introduction to themed section. *Social Policy and Society*, 6, 529-532.
- Costelloe, A. (2003) *Third level education in Irish prisons: Who participates and why?* Unpublished doctoral thesis, The Open University.
- Costelloe, A. (2014) Learning for liberation, teaching for transformation: Can education in prison prepare prisoners for active citizenship? *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies*, 14(1), 30-36.
- Courtenay, B. C., Merriam, S. B. & Reeves, P. M. (1998) The centrality of meaning-making in transformational learning: How HIV-positive adults make sense of their lives. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(2), 65-84.
- Cranton, P. (2000) Individual differences and transformative learning. In: Associates, J. M. (ed.) *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. 2nd ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Cranton, P. (2006) *Understanding and promoting transformative learning: a guide for educators of adults*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.



- Cranton, P. & Hoggan, C. (2012) Evaluating transformative learning. In: Taylor, E. W. & Cranton, P. (ed.) *The handbook of transformative learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Crewe, B. (2006) Prison, drug-dealing and the ethnographic lense. *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 45(4), 347-368.
- Crewe, B., Warr, J., Bennett, P. & Smith, A. (2014) The emotional geography of prison life. *Theoretical Criminology*, 18(1), 56-74.
- Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2013) Third aggregate report on offender management in prison: Findings on a series of joint inspections by the HM Inspectorate of probation and the HM Inspectorate of prisons. Available: [https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/cjji/inspections/third-aggregate-report-on-offender-management-in-prisons/#.U9aHE7HG\\_cw](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/cjji/inspections/third-aggregate-report-on-offender-management-in-prisons/#.U9aHE7HG_cw).
- Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2014) *Resettlement provision for adult offenders: Accommodation and education, training and employment*. London: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons.
- Davis, L. M., Bozick, R., Steele, J. L., Saunders, J. & Miles, J. N. V. (2013) *Evaluating the effectiveness of correctional education: A meta-analysis of programs that provide education to incarcerated adults*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.
- de Viggiani, N. (2007) Unhealthy prisons: exploring structural determinants of prison health. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 29(1), 115-35.
- Denscombe, M. (2003) *The good research guide: for small scale research projects*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000) *Handbook of qualitative research*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Department of Business Innovation and Skills (2011) *Making prisons work: Skills for rehabilitation, review of offender learning*. London: BIS.
- Dirkx, J. M., Mezirow, J. & Cranton, P. (2006) Musings and reflections on the meaning, context, and process of transformative learning: A dialogue between John M. Dirkx and Jack Mezirow. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 4(2), 123-139.
- Duguid, S. (1981) Moral development, justice and democracy in prison. *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 23, 147-164.

- Duguid, S. (2000a) *Can prisons work? The prisoner as object and subject in modern corrections* Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press.
- Duguid, S. (2000b) Theory and correctional enterprise. In: Wilson, D. & Reuss, A. (ed.) *Prisoner Education: Stories of Change and Transformation*. Winchester: Waterside Press.
- Duguid, S. & Pawson, R. (1998) Education, change, and transformation: The prison experience. *Evaluation Review*, 22(4), 470-495.
- Earle, R. & Phillips, C. (2012) Digesting men? Ethnicity, gender and food: perspectives from a prison ethnography. *Theoretical Criminology*, 16, 141.
- Elliott-Marshall, R., Ramsay, M. & Stewart, D. (2005) Alternative approaches to integrating offenders into the community. In: Harper, G. & Chitty, C. (ed.) *The impact of corrections on re-offending: A review of 'what works'*. London: RDS Publications.
- Engeström, Y. (2001) Expansive learning at work: Toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(1), 133-156.
- Entwistle, N. & Peterson, E. R. (2004) Conceptions of learning and knowledge in higher education: Relationships with study behaviour and influences of learning environments. *International Journal of Educational Research and Evaluation*, 41, 407-428.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968) *Identity, youth, and crisis*, London: Faber.
- Farrall, S. (2002) *Rethinking what works with offenders: Probation, social context and desistance*, London: Routledge.
- Farrall, S. (2006) *What is qualitative longitudinal research? Papers in social research Methods: Qualitative series number 11*. London: London School of Economics and Political Science Methodology Institute.
- Farrall, S., Bottoms, A. & Shapland, J. (2010) Social structures and desistance from crime. *European Journal of Criminology*, 7(6), 546-570.
- Farrall, S. & Calverley, A. (2006) *Understanding desistance from crime*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Farrall, S. & Maruna, S. (2004) Desistance-focused criminal justice policy research: Introduction to a special issue on desistance

- from crime and public policy. *The Howard Journal*, 43(4), 358-367.
- Farrington, D. (1986) Age and crime. *Crime and Justice*, 7, 189-250.
- Farrington, D. & Jolliffe, D. (2002) *A feasibility study into using a randomised controlled trial to evaluate treatment pilots at HMP Whitemoor*. London: Home Office.
- Farrington, D. & Welsh, B., C (2006) A half century of randomized control experiments on crime and justice. *Crime & Justice*, 34, 55-132.
- Flood-Page, C., Cambell, S., Harrington, V. & Miller, J. (2000) *Youth crime: Findings from 1998/99 youth lifestyles survey: Home Office research study 209*, In: Home Office Research, D. a. S. D. (ed.). London: RDS Publications.
- Forrest, R. & Kearns, A. (2001) Social cohesion, social capital and the neighbourhood. *Urban studies*, 38(12), 2125-2143.
- Forster, W. (1976) *The higher education of prisoners*, In: Jones, H. A. (ed.) *Vaughan Papers in Adult Education* No. 21. Leicester: University of Leicester.
- Forster, W. (1996) England and Wales: the state of prison education. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 37(2).
- Forster, W. (1998) *Education behind bars : international comparisons* Leicester: NIACE.
- Fuller, A. (2007) Mid-life 'transitions' to higher education: Developing a multi-level explanation of increasing participation. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 39(2), 217-235.
- Garrison, D. R. & Kanuka, H. (2004) Blended learning: Uncovering its transformative potential in higher education. *Internet and Higher Education*, 7, 95-105.
- Gelsthorpe, L. & Morris, A. (2002) Women's imprisonment in England and Wales: A penal paradox. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 2(3), 277-301.
- Giddens, A. (1984) *The constitution of society*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gilligan, C. (1977) In a different voice: women's conceptions of self and of morality. *Harvard Educational Review*, 47(4), 481-517.

- Gilligan, C. (1982) *In a different voice*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Giordano, P. C., Cernkovich, S. A. & Rudolph, J. L. (2002) Gender, crime and desistance: Towards a theory of cognitive transformation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 107(4), 990-1064.
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967) *The discovery of grounded theory*, Chicago: Aldine.
- Glueck, S. & Glueck, E. (1950) *Unraveling juvenile delinquency*, Cambridge MC: Harvard University Press.
- Goffman, E. (1968) *Asylums: essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Goffman, E. (1969) *The presentation of self in everyday life*, London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press.
- Habermas, J. (1984) *The theory of communication action: V1 reason and the rationalization of society*, London: Heinemann.
- Hammersley, M. (1992) *What's wrong with ethnography*, London: Routledge.
- Hammersley, M. (2003) 'Analytics' are no substitute for methodology: A response to Speer and Hutchby. *Sociology*, 37(2), 339-351.
- Hammersley, M. & Atkinson, P. (2007) *Ethnography: principles in practice*, London: Routledge.
- Hammersley, M. & Gomm, R. (2006) Recent radical criticism of the interview in qualitative inquiry. In: (ed.) *Module B2 Study Guide*. Milton Keynes: Open University.
- Hammersley, M. & Traianou (2012) Ethics and educational research, British Educational Research Association on-line resource. Available: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethics-and-educational-research>.
- Hancock, V. (2010) Essential, desirable or optional? Making distance e-learning courses available to those without internet access. *European Journal of Open, Distance and E-Learning* [Online]. Available: <http://www.eurodl.org/index.php?p=current&sp=full&article=410>.
- Harper, G. & Chitty, C. (2005) *The impact of corrections on re-offending: a review of 'what works'*. Home Office Research

*Development and Statistics Directorate.* London: SDI Publications

- Hartree, A. (1984) Malcolm Knowles' theory of andragogy: A critique. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 3(3), 203-210.
- Hedderman, C. & Gelsthorpe, L. (1997) *Understanding the sentencing of women. Research Study 291.* London: Home Office.
- Hedderman, C. & Hough, M. (2004) Getting tough or being effective: What matters? . In: Mair, G. (ed.) *What matters in probation.* Cullompton: Willan.
- HM Government (2005) *Reducing re-offending through skills and employment, Cm 6702.* Norwich: TSO (Stationery Office).
- HM Government (2006) *Reducing re-offending through skills and employment: Next steps.* Nottingham: DfES Publications.
- Hodkinson, P. & Bloomer, M. (2001) Dropping out of further education: complex causes and simplistic policy assumptions. *Research Papers in Education*, 16(2), 117-140.
- Hodkinson, P. & James, D. (2003) Transforming learning cultures in further education. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 55(4), 389-406.
- Holland, J., Thomson, R. & Henderson, S. (2007) Qualitative longitudinal research: A discussion paper. *Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group Working Paper No. 21* [Online]. Available: [www.lsbu.ac.uk/ahs/downloads/families/familieswp21.pdf](http://www.lsbu.ac.uk/ahs/downloads/families/familieswp21.pdf).
- Hollin, C. R. & Bilby, C. (2007) Addressing offender behaviour: 'What works' and beyond. In: Jewkes, Y. (ed.) *Handbook on Prisons.* Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing.
- Home Office (1966) *Report of the inquiry into prison escapes and security (the Mountbatten Report).* London: HMSO.
- Home Office (2001) *Statistics on women and the criminal justice system: A section 95 publication under the Criminal Justice Act 1991.* London: Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.
- Home Office (2004) *Reducing re-offending national action plan.* London: Home Office.

- Home Office (2007) *A report by Baroness Jean Corston of a review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system*,. London: Home Office.
- House of Commons (2005a) *Education and skills committee: Prison education, seventh report of session 2004-05*. London: HMSO.
- House of Commons (2005b) *Home affairs committee: Rehabilitation of prisoners. First report of session 2004-05, Volume 1*. London: HMSO.
- Hughes, E. (2006) *Free to Learn? Prisoner-students' views on distance learning*. Mitcham: Prisoners Education Trust.
- Hughes, E. (2007) *Thinking inside the box: British prisoner-students' experiences of distance learning* Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Central England in Birmingham.
- Hughes, E. (2012) *Education in prison: Studying through distance learning*, Farnham: Ashgate.
- Hulley, S., Liebling, A. & Crewe, B. (2012) Respect in prisons: Prisoners' experiences of respect in public and private sector prisons *Criminology and Criminal Justice online*, 12(1), 3-23.
- Hurry, J., Brazier, L., Parker, M. & Wilson, A. (2006) *Rapid evidence assessment of interventions that promote employment for offenders*, In: Dfes (ed.). DfES Publications.
- Hurry, J., Brazier, L., Wilson, A., Emslie-Henry, R. & Snapes, K. (2010) *Improving the literacy and numeracy of young people in custody and in the community*. London: National Research and Development Centre, Institute of Education.
- Hurry, J., Rogers, L., Simonot, M. & Wilson, A. (2012) *Inside education: The aspirations and realities of prison education for under 25s in the London area*. London: Centre for Education in the Criminal Justice System, IoE.
- Illeris, K. (2003) Towards a contemporary and comprehensive theory of learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 22(4), 396-406.
- Illeris, K. (2013) *Transformative Learning and Identity*, London: Routledge.
- Jelfs, A., Richardson, J. T. E. & Price, L. (2009) Student and tutor perceptions of effective tutoring in distance education. *Distance Education*, 30(3), 419-441.

- Jewkes, Y. (2002) The use of media in constructing identities in the masculine environment of men's prisons. *European Journal of Communication*, 17(2), 205-225.
- Jupp, H. (2010) *Higher education in prison: A transformative experience?* Unpublished Masters thesis, The Open University.
- Kegan, R. (1994) *In over our heads*, London: Harvard University Press.
- Kegan, R. (2000) What 'form' transforms? A constructive-developmental approach to transformative learning. In: Mezirow, J. a. A. (ed.) *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. San Francisco, MA: Jossey-Bass.
- King, R. D. (2007) Security, control and the problems of containment. In: Jewkes, Y. (ed.) *Handbook on Prisons*. Cullompton: Willan Publishing.
- Knowles, M. S. (1975) *Self-directed learning: A guide to learners and teachers*, New York: Cambridge Books.
- Knowles, M. S. (1984) Introduction: the art and science of helping adults learn. In: Knowles, M. S. a. A. (ed.) *Andragogy in Action: Applying modern principles of adult learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kohlberg, L. (1977) Implications of moral stages for adult education. *Religious education*, 72(2), 183-201.
- Kolb, A. & Kolb, D. (2005) Learning styles and learning spaces: Enhancing experiential learning in higher education. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 4(2), 193-212.
- Kvale, S. (2006) Dominance through interviews and dialogues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(3), 480-500.
- Laub, J. H. & Sampson, R. J. (2003) *Shared beginnings, divergent lives: Delinquent boys to age 70* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- LeBel, T. P., Burnett, R., Maruna, S. & Bushway, S. (2008) The "chicken and the egg" of subjective and social factors in desistance from crime. *European Journal of Criminology*, 5(2), 130-58.

- Lee, R. M. (1995) *Dangerous fieldwork*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Liebling, A. (2001) Whose side are we on? Theory, practice and allegiances in prison research. *British Journal of Criminology*, 41, 472-484.
- Liebling, A. (2007) Prison suicide and its prevention. In: Jewkes, Y. (ed.) *Handbook on prisons*. Cullompton: Willan Publishing.
- Liebling, A. (2013) Identity and emotion in a high security prison. *Criminal Justice Matters*, 91(1), 22-23.
- Liebling, A. & Price, D. (2001) *The prison officer*, Leyhill: Prison Service Journal Publications.
- London Probation Trust. (2012) *MAPPa website* [Online]. Available: [http://www.london-probation.org.uk/what we do/public protection mappa.aspx](http://www.london-probation.org.uk/what%20we%20do/public%20protection%20mappa.aspx).
- Maguire, M. & Raynor, P. (2006) How the resettlement of prisoners promotes desistance from crime: Or does it? *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 6(1), 19-38.
- Makoe, M., Richardson, J. T. E. & Price, L. (2008) Conceptions of learning in adult students embarking on distance education. *Higher Education*, 55, 303-320.
- Mandela, N. (1994) *Long walk to freedom*, London: Abacus.
- Mandela, N. (ed.) (2003). *An address at the Planetarium, Johannesburg, South Africa, July 16th, 2003*.
- Manger, T. & Eikeland, O.-J. (2009) Introduction. In: Eikeland, O., Manger, T. & Asbjørnsen, A. (ed.) *Education in Nordic Prisons: Prisoners' Educational Background, Preferences and Motivation*. Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Manger, T., Eikeland, O.-J., Diseth, Å., Hetland, H. & Asbjørnsen, A. (2010) Prison Inmates' educational motives: Are they pushed or pulled? *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 54(6), 535-547.
- Martinson, R. (1974) What works? Questions and answers about prison reform. *Public Interest*, 5 (Spring), 32-42.
- Marton, F. (1976) What does it take to learn? Some implications of an alternative view of learning. In: Entwistle, N. (ed.) *Strategies for Research and Development in Higher Education*. Amsterdam: Swets and Zeitlinger.
- Marton, F., Dall'Alba, G. & Beaty, E. (1993) Conceptions of learning. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 19, 277-300.



- Maruna, S. (2001) *Making Good: How ex-convicts reform and rebuild their lives*, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Maruna, S., Wilson, L. & Curran, K. (2006) Why god is often found behind bars: Prison conversions and the crisis of self-narrative. *Research in Human Development*, 3(2-3), 161-184.
- Mason, J. (2002) *Qualitative researching*. London: Sage.
- Matrix Knowledge Group (2009) *Lifelong learning and crime: An analysis of the cost-effectiveness of in-prison educational and vocational interventions*, IFLL Public Value Paper 2. Leicester: NIACE.
- Matza, D. (1964) *Delinquency and drift*, New York: Wiley.
- McAdams, D. P. (2001) Coding autobiographical episodes for themes of agency and communion. Available: [https://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/docs/Agency\\_Communion\\_01.pdf](https://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/docs/Agency_Communion_01.pdf).
- McAdams, D. P. & de St. Aubin, E. (1992) The theory of generativity and its assessment through self-report, behavioural acts, and narrative themes in autobiography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 62(6), 1003-1015.
- McClellan, M. (2001) Can we relate conceptions of learning to student academic achievement? *Teaching in Higher Education*, 6(3), 399-413.
- McNeill, F. (2004) Desistance, rehabilitation and correctionalism: Developments and prospects in Scotland. *The Howard Journal* 43(4), 420-436.
- McNeill, F. (2012) Four forms of offender rehabilitation: Towards an integrated perspective. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 17(1), 18-36.
- McNeill, F. (2013) Punishment as rehabilitation. In: Bruinsma, G. & Weisburd, D. (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*. New York: Springer.
- McNeill, F. (2014) 23 May 2014 Three aspects of desistance. *Workshops* [Online]. Available from: <http://blogs.iriss.org.uk/discoveringdesistance/2014/05/23/three-aspects-of-desistance/>.
- McNeill, F. & Weaver, B. (2010) *Changing lives*, Desistance research and offender management. Glasgow: Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research.

- Mehigan, J. & Rowe, A. (2007) Problematizing prison privatization: an overview of the debate. *In: Jewkes, Y. (ed.) Handbook on Prisons*. Cullompton: Willan publishing.
- Merriam, S. B. (2001) Andragogy and self-directed learning: pillars of adult learning. *New directions in adult and continuing education*, 89(Spring 2001), 3-13.
- Merriam, S. B. (2004) The role of cognitive development in Mezirow's transformational learning theory. *Adult education quarterly*, 55(1), 60-68.
- Mezirow, J. (1985) A critical theory of self-directed learning. *In: Brookfield, S. (ed.) Self-directed learning: from theory to practice. New directions of continuing education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (1991) *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (1997) Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 74, 5-12.
- Mezirow, J. (2000a) Learning to think like an adult. *In: J. Mezirow & Associates (ed.) Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (2000b) Preface. *In: J. Mezirow and Associates (ed.) Learning as transformation: critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (2003) Transformative learning as discourse. *Journal of transformative education*, 1(1), 58-63.
- Mezirow, J. (2004) Forum comment on Sharan Merriam's "the role of cognitive development in Mezirow's transformational learning theory". *Adult Education Quarterly*, 55(1), 69-70.
- Mezirow, J. (2009) Transformative learning theory. *In: Mezirow, J., Taylor, E. W. & Associates (ed.) Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, workplace, and higher education*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.
- Mezirow, J., and Associates (1990) *Fostering critical reflection in adulthood*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994) *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*, London: Sage.

- Mills, H. & Grimshaw, R. (2012) A life sentence really. Available: <http://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/publications/life-sentence-really>.
- Ministry of Justice (2005) *PSO-3300 Release on Temporary License*.
- Ministry of Justice (2007) *Penal policy: A background paper 2/2007*. London: MoJ
- Ministry of Justice (2010a) Compendium of reoffending statistics and analysis. Available: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/statistics/mojstats/compendium-of-reoffending-statistics-and-analysis.pdf>.
- Ministry of Justice (2010b) *PSI 33/2010: Open university, higher education and distance learning*.
- Ministry of Justice (2011) Offender management statistics quarterly bulletin: January to march. Available: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/statistics/prisons-and-probation/oms-quarterly/oms-quarterly-editions>.
- Ministry of Justice (2012) Proven re-offending statistics quarterly bulletin October 2009 to September 2010. Available: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/statistics/reoffending/proven-reoffending-oct-09-sept-10.pdf>.
- Ministry of Justice (2013a) *Transforming rehabilitation: A strategy for reform*. Norwich: TSO (Stationary Office).
- Ministry of Justice (2013b) *Transforming rehabilitation: A summary of evidence on rehabilitation*. Norwich: TSO (Stationary Office).
- Moore, J. (2005) Is higher education ready for transformative learning? A question explored in the study of sustainability. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 3(1), 76-91.
- Morrice, L. (2012) Learning and refugees: Recognising the darker side of transformative learning. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 63(3), 251-271.
- Nash, R. (1999) Bourdieu, 'habitus', and educational research: is it all worth the candle? *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 20(2), 175-187.
- National Audit Office (2008) *Meeting needs? The offenders learning and skills service*, Norwich: TSO (Stationary Office).

- National Audit Office (2013) *Managing the prison estate*. Norwich: TSO (Stationary Office).
- Nightingale, D. J. & Cromby, J. (eds.) (1999). *Social constructionist psychology: A practical analysis of theory and practice*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Office for National Statistics. (2014) *Guide to social capital* [Online]. Available: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/user-guidance/social-capital-guide/the-social-capital-project/guide-to-social-capital.html>.
- Open University. (2011) *Statement on equality and diversity* [Online]. Available: <http://www8.open.ac.uk/about/main/admin-and-governance/policies-and-statements/statement-equality-and-diversity>.
- Open University. (2014) *Offender learner data and developments* [Online]. Available: <http://www.open.ac.uk/about/offender-learning/data-and-developments>.
- Owers, A. (2007) Imprisonment in the 21st century: A view from the Inspectorate. In: Jewkes, Y. (ed.) *Handbook on Prisons*. Cullompton: Willan Publishing.
- Pawson, R. & Tilley, N. (1997) *Realistic evaluation*, London: Sage.
- Perry, W. G. (1970) *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years: A scheme*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Piacentini, L. (2007) Researching Russian prisons: a consideration of new and established methodologies in prison research. In: Jewkes, Y. (ed.) *Handbook on Prisons*. Cullompton: Willan Publishing.
- Pike, A. (Year) Published. Developing online communities to support distance learning in secure environments. 2nd International Multi-conference on Society, Cybernetics and Informatics, 2009 Orlando, FL. Winter Garden, Florida: International Institute of Informatics and Systemics, 13-16.
- Pike, A. (2010a) *COLMSCT CETL final report: Building bridges across the digital divide for HE students in prison*, Open University. Online at <http://www.open.ac.uk/cetl-workspace/cetlcontent/documents/4bd99e868e43a.pdf>.
- Pike, A. (2010b) *Investigating technology-supported learning in prison*. Unpublished Masters thesis, Open University.

- Pike, A. & Adams, A. (2012) Digital exclusion or learning exclusion? An ethnographic study of adult male distance learners in English prisons. *Research in Learning Technology*, 20(4), 363-376.
- Potter, J. & Wetherell, M. (2001) Unfolding discourse analysis. In: Wetherell, M., Taylor, S. & J., Y. S. (ed.) *Discourse theory and practice: A reader*. London: Sage with The Open University.
- Prison Reform Trust & Prisoners Education Trust (2013) *Through the gateway: How computers can transform rehabilitation*. London: Prison Reform Trust.
- Prisoner Learning Alliance (2013) *Smart rehabilitation: Learning how to get better outcomes*. Mitcham: Prisoners Education Trust.
- Prisoners Education Trust (2012) *Brain cells 2: Listening to prisoner learners*. Mitcham: PET.
- Prisoners Education Trust. (2014a) *Access to success fund* [Online]. Available: <http://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/index.php?id=566>.
- Prisoners Education Trust. (2014b) *Internet for inmates in Norwegian prisons: IFI* [Online]. Available: <http://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/index.php?id=344>.
- Reuss, A. (1997) *Higher education & personal change in prisoners*. PhD, Leeds.
- Reuss, A. (1999) Prison(er) education. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 38(2), 113-127.
- Reuss, A. & Wilson, D. (2000) The way forward. In: Wilson, D. & Reuss, A. (ed.) *Prison(er) Education: Stories of Change and Transformation*. Winchester: Waterside Press.
- Richardson, J. T. E. (2000) *Researching student learning: approaches to studying in campus-based and distance education*, Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press.
- Richardson, J. T. E. (2013) Epistemological development in higher education. *Educational research review*, 9, 191-206.
- Richardson, J. T. E., Morgan, A. & Woodley, A. (1999) Approaches to studying in distance education. *Higher Education*, 37(1), 23-55.
- Ripstein, A. (1999) *Equality, responsibility and the law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Roberts, L. & Indermaur, D. (2003) Signed consent forms in criminological research: Protection for researchers and ethics committees but a threat to research participants? *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 10(2), 289-299.
- Ryan, R. M. & Deci, E. L. (2000a) Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 54-67.
- Ryan, R. M. & Deci, E. L. (2000b) Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68-78.
- Säljö, R. (1979a) Learning about learning. *Higher Education*, 8, 443-451.
- Säljö, R. (1979b) *Learning in the learner's perspective*, Reports from The Institute of Education. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.
- Sampson, R. J. & Laub, J. H. (1993) *Crime in the making: Pathways and turning points through life*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Schoon, I. & Bynner, J. (2003) Risk and resilience in the life course: Implications for interventions and social policies. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 6(1), 21-31.
- Schüller, T. (2009) *Crime and lifelong learning*, Inquiry into the future for Lifelong Learning. Leicester: NIACE.
- Schüller, T. & Watson, D. (2009) *Learning through Life: Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning*, Leicester: NIACE.
- Scott, D. (2007) The changing face of the English prison: a critical review of the aims of imprisonment. In: Jewkes, Y. (ed.) *Handbook on prisons*. Cullompton: Willan Publishing.
- Shuy, R. W. (2003) In-person versus telephone interviewing. In: Holstein, J. A. & Gubrium, J. F. (ed.) *Inside interviewing: New lenses, new concerns*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Snyder, C., Harris, C., Anderson, J., Holleran, S., Irving, L., Sigmon, S., Yoshinobu, L., Gibb, J., Langelle, C. & Harney, P. (1991) The will and the ways: Development and validation of an individual-difference measure of hope. *Personality and Social Psychology*, 60(4), 570-585.
- Sparks, R., Bottoms, A. & Hay, W. (1996) *Prisons and the problem of order*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990) *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*, London: Sage.
- Sturges, J. E. & Hanrahan, K. J. (2004) Comparing telephone and face-to-face qualitative interviewing: A research note. *Qualitative Research*, 4(1), 107-118.
- Sykes, G. (1958) *The Society of Captives: a study of a maximum security prison*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Taylor, E. W. (1998) *The theory and practice of transformative learning: A critical review. Information series no. 374*. Columbus, Ohio: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education.
- Taylor, E. W. (2007) An update of transformative learning theory: A critical review of the empirical research (1999–2005). *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26(2), 173-191.
- Taylor, K. (2000) Teaching with developmental intention. In: Mezirow, J. a. A. (ed.) *Learning as transformation: critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Taylor, K., Marienau, C. & Fiddler, M. (2000) Developing adult learners. *Josey-Bass, San Francisco*.
- The Shannon Trust. (2014) *Toe-by-Toe reading plan* [Online]. Available: <http://www.shannontrust.org.uk/our-work/the-reading-plan/>.
- Thomas, J. (1993) *Doing critical ethnography*, Newbury: Sage
- Thomson, R. & Holland, J. (2003) Hindsight, foresight and insight: the challenges of longitudinal qualitative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 6 (3), 233-244.
- Tough, A. M. (1975) *Adults learning Projects*.
- Turley, C. & Webster, S. (2010) *Implementation and delivery of the testbeds virtual campus*. London: National Centre for Social Research
- United Nations (2009) *Promotion and protection of human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development: Report of the special rapporteur on the right to education*. Human Rights Council, 11th Session, Agenda Item 3,.

- Vennard, J. & Hedderman, C. (1998) Effective Interventions with Offenders. In: Goblatt, P. & Lewis, C. (ed.) *Reducing offending: An Assessment of Research Evidence on Ways of Dealing with Offending Behaviour: Home Office Research Study 187*. London: HMSO Publications Centre.
- Vennard, J. & Hedderman, C. (2009) Helping offenders into employment: How far is voluntary sector expertise valued in a contracting-out environment? *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 9(2), 225-245.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978) *Mind in Society: The development of higher psychological processes*, London: Harvard University Press.
- Wach, E., Ward, R. & Jacimovic, R. (2013) *IDS Practice paper in brief 13*. Institute of Developmental Studies.
- Waldram, J. B. (1998) Anthropology in prison: negotiating consent and accountability with a 'captured' population. *Human Organization*, 57(2), 238-244.
- Ward, J. & Henderson, Z. (2010) Some practical and ethical issues encountered while conducting tracking research with young people leaving the 'care' system. *International journal of social research methodology*, 6(2), 255-259.
- Watts, J. (2010) Teaching a distance higher education curriculum behind bars: challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Open and Distance Learning*, 25(1), 57-64.
- Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Williams, K., Papadopoulou, V. & Booth, N. (2012) *Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners*, , In: Ministry of Justice Analytical Services (ed.) Research Series 4/12 Ministry of Justice.
- Wilson, A. (2007) I go to get away from the cockroaches: Educentricity and the politics of education in prison. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 58(2), 185-203.
- Wilson, A. (2010) *Goodwill and good fortune: obstacles and opportunities for level 2 learners in local jails*, A report to the Prisoners Education Trust. Mitcham: Prisoners Education Trust.
- Wolcott, H. F. (2008) *Ethnography: A way of seeing*. AltaMira Press.



Woolf Lord Justice (1991) *Prison disturbances April 1990: Report of an enquiry by the Right Honourable Lord Justice Woolf (Parts I and II) and His Honour Judge Stephen Tumin (Part II)*. London: HMSO.



## APPENDICES

Appendix A: Glossary of terms

Appendix B: Selection of information sheets and consent form

B1: Pilot information sheet

B2: Pre-release information sheet

B3: Pre-release consent form

Appendix C: Interview prompts

- C1: Pre-release interview guide
- C2: Post-release interview guide

Appendix D: Ethical approval

Appendix E: NOMS Permission

- E1: NOMS permission letter Phase 2 (NOMS Phase 1)
- E2: NOMS permission letter Phase 3 (NOMS Phase 2)
- E3: Excerpt from spreadsheet used to short-list prisons for selection
- E4: Screenshot of 18-page NOMS permission form

Appendix F: Participant characteristics

- F1: Pilot participant characteristics
- F2: In-prison participant characteristics
- F3: Post-release education distribution of post-release participants

Appendix G: Longitudinal data collection

Appendix H: Thematic analysis examples

- H1: Example of layered labels
- H2: Example of how Phase 1 informed Phase 2
- H3: Example of graded text



## APPENDIX A: Glossary of terms

<b>Agency</b>	McAdams (2001) defines agency as containing self-mastery (through self-awareness or control), status/victory (prestige among peers or recognition), achievement/responsibility (success, pride, confidence) and empowerment (through mentor, teacher, God). Agency also requires motivation (Giddens, 1984) which requires autonomy and self-efficacy (Ryan and Deci, 2000b).
<b>Autonomy</b>	Knowles (1975) defines autonomy as the ability to learn on one's own and, according to Ryan and Deci (2000b), autonomy is a vital component for intrinsic motivation as it facilitates internalisation or self-reflection. However, (Chené, 1983) suggests that autonomy is dependent on the power that the learner has over their learning and must be identified within the learning context.
<b>Cat</b>	Category (of prison). For example Cat D (open:without perimeter fence) prison. Similarly, Cat A is a category A (maximum security) prison. Cat B is a fairly high security prison, often a local, prison taking prisoners directly from the courts. Cat C prison is lower security, closed (with a perimeter fence), and is often also a training prison. These are categories for male prisons. Female prisons are either closed or open.
<b>Generativity</b>	Generativity can be defined as a stage in the human lifecycle as "primarily the concern for establishing and guiding the next generation." (Erikson, 1968, p138). McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) suggest it becomes an issue as people grow older and need to be needed, but it "cannot be understood from a single personal or social standpoint, but that it must instead be viewed as a psychosocial patterning of demand, desire, concern, belief, commitment, action, and narration." (p 1013)
<b>Hope</b>	According to Snyder et al. (1991) and Burnett and Maruna (2004), hope is not only the expectation and desire for a specific goal (as per the dictionary definition), but also needs a realistic plan of how to meet that goal. The participants' sense of hope is raised if they are provided with the means of realising their aspirations. This may be especially important when hopes have been dashed many times previously, for example for ex-prisoners who had hoped but failed to stay out of prison.
<b>'Learning' prison</b>	A concept to describe the variation in support for learning in different prisons, developed initially from my MRes findings (Pike and Adams, 2012). A 'learning' prison is at the 'learning' end of a

	spectrum, with a learning culture which prioritises learning and provides space and time for independent learning. . High-security and therapeutic prisons with long-term prisoners are often at the 'learning' end of the spectrum. See also 'working' prison at the other end of the spectrum.
<b>MAPPA</b>	<b>Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements:</b> Probation, police, prison and other agencies working together locally to manage offenders who are of a higher risk of harm to others (London Probation Trust, 2012)
<b>MoJ</b>	<b>Ministry of Justice</b> Government department which controls the Prison and Probation Service of England and Wales through NOMS
<b>NOMS</b>	<b>National Offender Management Service</b> provided by the Ministry of Justice
<b>NVivo 10</b>	<b>NVivo</b> is a qualitative data analysis computer software package produced by QSR International
<b>OLASS</b>	<b>Offender Learning and Skills Service</b> provides learning and skills in prison via contracted providers, funded by the Skills Funding Agency
<b>PHDL</b>	<b>Prison-based Higher-level Distance Learning.</b> Prison-based distance learning which is at a post-compulsory level (level 3 and above)
<b>Resettlement</b>	The term used in England and Wales for the process of preparing prisoners for release into the community (see Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2014)
<b>Resilience</b>	A dynamic process of positive adaptation in the face of significant adversity or trauma. Indicators of resilience include coping, competence, social and problem-solving skills and optimism (Bottrell, 2007; Luthar et al., 2000; Schoon and Bynner, 2003)
<b>RoTL</b>	<b>Release on Temporary Licence:</b> Eligible prisoners are allowed out of prison for periods of time for work or home visits (Ministry of Justice, 2005)

<b>Self-efficacy</b>	Self-efficacy enables a person to approach a difficult task as a challenge to be mastered rather than as a threat to be avoided. "Not only can perceived self-efficacy have directive influence on choice of activities and settings, but, through expectations of eventual success, it can affect coping efforts once they are initiated." (Bandura, 1977, p194)
<b>SFA</b>	<b>Skills Funding Agency</b>
<b>Social capital</b>	Bourdieu (1985) defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or the potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutional relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (p 248). This has been interpreted by others as participation in networks where people have shared values which arise from those networks so that the participants contribute to common goals (Office for National Statistics, 2014; Schüller and Watson, 2009).
<b>Student-prisoner</b>	A prisoner who is completing Prison-based Higher-level Distance learning (PHDL), has completed PHDL in the past, or has considered completing PHDL and failed to engage.
<b>Toe-by-Toe</b>	A peer-mentoring scheme, run by the Shannon Trust, which enables one prisoner to teach another prisoner to read. It uses a synthetic phonics approach to decoding words, and is based on a scheme which teaches children with dyslexia to read (The Shannon Trust, 2014)
<b>Transformative learning</b>	"Learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change" and can be understood as "the epistemology of how adults learn to reason for themselves – advance and assess reasons for making a judgement rather than act on the assimilated beliefs, values, feelings and judgements of others." (Mezirow, 2009, p22-23)
<b>Virtual Campus:</b>	A resettlement tool designed to provide prisoners in England and Wales with secure access to employment, education and healthcare websites
<b>'Working' prison</b>	A concept. to describe the variation in support for learning in different prisons, developed initially from my MRes findings (Pike and Adams, 2012). A 'working' prison, at the 'working' end of a

	spectrum, has a working culture in which learning has a low priority and there is very little time or space provided for independent learning. Prisons, such as some lower security category C, training, prisons which concentrate on work, in preparation for release, may be described as 'working' prisons if they do not prioritise independent learning as well (Pike and Adams, 2012).
--	---



## APPENDIX B: Selection of information sheets and consent form

### B1: Pilot information sheet



The Open University

#### Information Sheet

**PhD Research Title: Prison-based higher level distance learning and its role in resettlement**

I am conducting research into higher level distance learning in prison (such as that provided by the Open University). I am interested to know your view of this type of learning. What makes it good or transformative? How is learning best supported and facilitated, where, and with what resources? I would also like to hear about your personal experiences of prison-based distance learning and whether that learning has played any role in your resettlement, your experiences on release from prison and your outlook on life. For example, do you think your learning has affected your employability in any way and are you thinking about continuing with your studies? The answers to these questions will help me to develop this research project further and to ask others, who are still in prison, the right questions. It may also help to inform those organisations who are involved with this learning in prison to provide a better and more helpful service for those who are due for release.

I would therefore like to interview you. If you agree, the interview will be very informal and last around 45 to 60 minutes. It will be audio-recorded to save me trying to scribble down everything that is said (but I will take notes if you prefer not to be recorded). Recordings will then be converted into type. I would also like to interview you again two or three times over the next year to see how you are getting on and to find out whether your opinions about your learning change over time.

This research has been approved by the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee and draws on the British Education Research Association's 2004 Guidelines. It is also registered under the Data Protection Act within the University. Everything you say will be completely confidential so I will not discuss it with anyone else. The data will be used for education and research purposes only and carefully stored at the University so no-one else will see it. It will be made anonymous so no real names will be used in any written reports, presentations or published papers.

Participation is completely voluntary and there will be no negative consequences whether you participate or not. You may also withdraw from the research at any time. If, after I have left you feel unhappy about anything you said and would like me to remove it from the records, you can contact me at the address below and until the analysis is under way (date to be provided), I will remove all or part of your words.

Thank-you very much for your time in reading this information; if you would like to participate, please sign and return the attached form and I hope you find the research interesting.

Anne Pike ([a.e.pike@open.ac.uk](mailto:a.e.pike@open.ac.uk))

*If you have any complaints or queries about this research please contact Anne Adams ([a.adams@open.ac.uk](mailto:a.adams@open.ac.uk)) at Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology (CREET), Jennie Lee Building, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA*



Information Sheet

**Research: Prison-based higher level distance learning and its impact on resettlement**

This research is investigating higher level distance learning in prison (such as that provided by the Open University). Your views about education generally and about distance learning in particular are required. How can this type of learning be supported and facilitated, where, and with what resources? Your personal experience of prison-based distance learning is important. What have you found particularly challenging or beneficial? What were the barriers? As you approach your release date, what are your thoughts about your future? For example, do you think your education in prison has affected your employability in any way and are you thinking about continuing with any studies on release? The answers to these questions will help to inform those organisations who are involved with this type of education in prison to provide a better and more helpful service, especially for those who are due for release. It may also inform policy makers or those who provide funding for this type of education.

Would you therefore be willing to be interviewed? If you agree, I will be visiting the prison soon and will interview as many eligible, consenting students as possible. The interview will be very informal and last around 45 to 60 minutes. With your consent, there could be another interview a few months after you have been released to see how you are getting on and to find out whether your opinions about your learning have changed over time.

This research has been approved by the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee and draws on the British Education Research Association's 2004 Guidelines. It is also registered under the Data Protection Act within the University. Everything you say will be completely confidential so I will not discuss it with anyone else. The data will be used for education and research purposes only and carefully stored at the University so no-one else will see it. It will be made anonymous so no real names will be used in reports, presentations or published papers.

Participation is completely voluntary and there will be no negative consequences whether you participate or not. You may also withdraw from the research at any time. If, after I have left you feel unhappy about anything you said and would like me to remove it from the records, you can contact me at the address below and until the analysis is under way (date to be provided), I will remove all or part of your words.

Thank-you for your time in reading this information, if you would like to participate please sign and return the attached form to education and I hope you find the research interesting.

**Anne Pike** ([a.e.pike@open.ac.uk](mailto:a.e.pike@open.ac.uk)) at Institute of Educational Technology, Jennie Lee Building, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA

If you have any complaints or queries about this research please contact Anne Adams ([a.adams@open.ac.uk](mailto:a.adams@open.ac.uk)) also at the above address





Consent Form

**PhD Research: Prison-based higher level distance learning  
and its impact on resettlement**

This is a request for your consent to participate in the above project, which is explained in the attached information sheet.

Please indicate your willingness (or otherwise) to take part in this research project by ticking the appropriate boxes and completing the details below. This is completely voluntary and your participation or non participation will not affect you or your future education in any way. If you do decide to participate, you will be free to withdraw at any time during the research.

Any Open University research project involving personal data is required to comply with the Data Protection Act. Such data will be kept secure and not released to any third party. All raw data (that is personally identifiable) will be destroyed after the whole project is complete.

☐ I am willing to take part in this research, and I give my permission for the data collected to be used in an **anonymous** format in any written reports, presentations and inclusion in published papers relating to this study.

☐ I am also willing to be contacted again shortly after release

OR

☐ I am not willing to take part in this research.

Name: ..... (Please print) Prison: .....

Latest course if applicable (title & provider): .....

Estimated Date of Release: .....

Signed: ..... Date: .....

*Please return to Education Department or directly to Anne Pike, Institute of Educational Technology, Jennie Lee Building, Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA*



## APPENDIX C: Interview prompts

### C1: Pre-release interview guide

#### Pre-release interview guide: open focus, aim for 5 stages: prompts only

##### **1. Background to study**

Confirm understanding of **information sheet**

Remind withdrawal until merged, total **confidentiality, anonymity**. If using **recorder** – stop whenever

**Confirm consent**, and additional **contact information?**

**Any questions?**

**2. Icebreaker:** Confirm PHDL course is (was) doing. Progress made, enjoyment, problems?

##### **3. Education/Socio-economic/ conviction history:**

**Pre-prison:** Age, ethnicity, quals. from school/college (pre-first conviction)

Age left school. Type of school

Area lived in – postcode

Parents – employment? Any relatives went to University?

Attitude towards education then?

Goals? Think back - what did you think then?

**Prison:** First conviction? How many others?

How many prisons? Where first? Any private?

Any remarkable? Differences? (General)

##### **4. The main points**

**Past:** Take me back, first study in prison, tell me your learning journey (If appropriate).

- Thoughts? Motives for study? Which prison?
- How learning facilitated? Who? What? When? Where? Best? (informal –who talk to?)
- See self as a student?
- Courses? Best? Worst?
- Work/training? Relates to education/learning?
- Goals and aims in the beginning?

**Present**, (if appropriate, this prison?)

- How study now? How facilitated? Who? What? Where When?
- Best? What is good support?
- Thoughts? What has most impact?
- Aims? Goals? Outlook, attitude, relation to others? What has affected these?
- Any qualifications gained in prison? What? What impact? What use?
- Employed? Good? Useful? What else? Related to learning?
- Attitude of others to learning? (friends, family, other inmates, staff?)

**Leaving prison**

- When leaving? Process for leaving? Other pre-release courses?
- Employment? Accommodation?
- Learning finished? Preparation required?
- Learning after release? Why? Aim?
- Thoughts about learning/education overall? Will it make any difference? **Transformational?**
- Hopes, Aspirations? What have affected these?

**5. Debrief:** Clarify issues raised, next steps, **reaffirm confidentiality and anonymity, withdrawal** up to when info is embedded (give a date).

Consent for next interview, contact details – no pressure, can withdraw at any time. No problem.

Note address if want to say anything after I leave.

**Any Questions?**

## C2: Post-release interview guide

### Post-release interview guide: open focus, aim for 4 stages: prompts only

#### 1. Remind about study

Confirm understanding of **information sheet**

Remind withdrawal until merged, total **confidentiality, anonymity**. If using **recorder** – stop whenever

**Confirm consent**, and additional **contact information**?

**Any questions?**

**2. Icebreaker:** Still studying? Results from previous study? Progress made, enjoyment, problems?

#### 3. The main points

**Past – tell me what you think now about prison education – looking back**

- How was transition to community? Via another prison?
- What support offered re. employment, accommodation (if relevant) and continuity of study?
- Any support from other organisations/charities? How?
- Any training provided?
- Follow-up on any specific issues from previous interview – resolved?

**Present**

- In employment? Permanent? Enjoyable? Related to learning?
- Still studying? How facilitated? Who? What? Where When? Virtual Campus?
- Still see self as a student?
- Has distance learning had any impact on current situation? Skills? Qualifications? Attitude?
- Thoughts about education generally?
- Aims? Goals? Outlook, attitude, place in society? What has affected these?
- Attitude of others (friends, family, probation, employer)

**Future**

- Learning? Employment? Accommodation?
- Hopes, Aspirations?
- How have these changed? Why?
- **Has DL made a difference? Is it transformational?**


**4. Debrief:** Clarify issues raised, next steps, **reaffirm confidentiality and anonymity, withdrawal up to when info is embedded (give a date).**

Note address if want to say anything after I leave.

**Any Questions?**

## APPENDIX D: Ethical approval letter from Open University's Human Research Ethics Committee

The Open University



**From** Dr Duncan Banks  
Chair, The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee

**Email** d.banks@open.ac.uk

**Extension** 59198

**To** Anne Pike, CREET.

**Subject** 'Conceptions of 'good' prison-based higher level distance learning and perceptions of its impact on released male prisoners.'

**Ref** HREC/2011/#929/1

**Red form** n/a

**Submitted** 1 April 2011

**Date** 27 April 2011

Memorandum

---

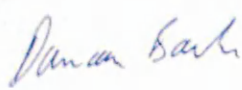
This memorandum is to confirm that the research protocol for the above-named research project, as submitted for ethics review, is approved by the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee subject to addressing the following points from the reviewers;

1. The information sheet uses the phrase 'prison-based higher level distance learning'. Do you think that the meaning of this will be completely clear to non-specialists? Perhaps it would be sensible to define what is meant by 'higher level' and 'distance learning' in this context?
2. The information sheet also refers to the OU 'Ethics Committee'. It would be sensible to give the HREC its correct title.
3. It is good practice to include the name of an additional person, in addition to the researcher, whom participants may contact if they have any questions or concerns. In this case, this would probably be the research supervisor.
4. Given the particular vulnerability of prisoners, I think it is particularly important to state clearly on the information and/or consent forms, that participation is entirely voluntary, and that there will be no negative consequences where a prisoner chooses not to take part. The researcher is clearly aware of this issue, since it is mentioned on the pro forma, but I would like to see it addressed as clearly as possible on the documentation as well.
5. The researcher does not seem to have completed the declaration section at the end of the pro forma..

Please make sure you address the point and reply to [Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk](mailto:Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk). We will endeavour to respond as quickly as possible so that your research is not delayed in any way.

At the conclusion of your project, by the date that you stated in your application, the Committee would like to receive a summary report on the progress of this project, any ethical issues that have arisen and how they have been dealt with.

Regards,



Duncan Banks  
Chair OU HREC

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (number RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (number SC 039302)

HREC\_2011-#929-Pike-1.doc





## APPENDIX E: NOMS Permission process: selected examples

### E1: NOMS permission letter Phase 2 (NOMS Phase 1)



**Ministry of  
JUSTICE**

National Offender  
Management Service

National Offender Management Service  
National Research Committee  
BCG Building  
HMP Full Sutton  
York, YO41 1PS

Mrs Anne Pike  
PhD candidate and lecturer  
The Open University  
Centre for Research in Education and  
Educational Technology  
Jennie Lee Bldg,  
Walton Hall,  
Milton Keynes  
MK7 6AA  
[a.e.pike@open.ac.uk](mailto:a.e.pike@open.ac.uk)

Telephone: 01759 475078  
Fax: 01759 475 073  
Email: [National.Research@noms.qsi.gov.uk](mailto:National.Research@noms.qsi.gov.uk)

19 August 2014

Research Title: Investigating prison based higher level distance learning (PHDL) and its impact on resettlement: Phase 1 Is PHDL transformative and what is good practice?

Reference No: 144-11

Dear Mrs Pike

Further to your application to undertake research in HM Prison Service and our letter dated 14 September 2011. The NRC is pleased to grant approval in principle for your research, subject to you addressing the concerns raised by the committee and compliance with the conditions outlined below:

Please provide the following information to the committee, before starting of this research:

- More detail on Phase 2 and Phase 3?
- Sampling: why only have two women in sample (+ 2 in the comparison group)? This seems too few to actually say anything worthwhile about possible gender differences. I suggest they either restrict the study to male only prisons, or increase the sample size.
- Although the study is likely to have a high level of engagement for participants, there is likely to be some attrition in stage 2 when they follow offenders up in the community. They should perhaps consider increasing the sample size. It wasn't clear if they intend to follow up the comparison group of those who dropped out of distance learning, but attrition may be higher among this group?
- The proposal title included Impact on resettlement, but the research application doesn't actual cover this?
- No mention of the risk of attrition so the NRC would like to see some acknowledgement and mitigation for this as this could jeopardise the whole piece.

#### Terms and Conditions

(No research can start until the terms and conditions have been agreed to formally by email)

- Prisons - Approval from the Governor of each Establishment you wish to research in. (Please note that NRC approval does not guarantee access to Establishments, access is at the discretion of the Governor and subject to local operational factors and pressures) Researchers are under a

duty to disclose certain information to the Prison Service. This includes behaviour that is against prison rules and can be adjudicated against (see Section 51 of the Prison Rules 1999), illegal acts, and behaviour that is harmful to the research participant (e.g. intention to self-harm or complete suicide). Researchers should make research participants aware of this requirement

- Subject to clearance of vetting procedures for each establishment.
- Probation Trusts - Approval from the Chief Executive of the Probation Trust you wish to research in. (*Please note that NRC approval does not guarantee access to Probation Trusts, access is at the discretion of the Chief Executive and subject to local operational factors and pressures*) Researchers are under a duty to disclose to Probation Trusts if an individual discloses information that either indicates a risk of harm to themselves or others or refers to a new crime that they have committed or plan to commit. Researchers should make research participants aware of this requirement
  - Subject to clearance of vetting procedures for each Probation Trust
- NOMS reserves the right to halt research at any time (as of the PSI), given the sensitivity of the issues concerned, will not always be possible to provide an explanation. NOMS will undertake where possible to provide the research institution/Sponsor with a covering statement to clarify that the decision to stop the research does not reflect on their capability or behaviour.
- Compliance with all security requirements.
- Compliance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.
- Research Proposal - Informing and updating the NRC promptly of any changes made to the planned methodology.
- It being made clear to participants verbally and in writing that they may withdraw from the research at any point and that this will not have adverse impact on them.
- The NRC receiving an electronic copy of any research report submitted as a result of the research with an attached executive summary of the product of the research.
- The NRC receiving an electronic copy of any papers submitted for publication based on this research at the time of submission and at least one month in advance of the publication.

When approaching establishments/probation trusts, a copy of this letter must be attached to the request to prove that the NRC has approved this piece of research in principle.

Once the research is completed, and received by the NRC Co-ordinator, it will be lodged at the Prison Service College Library.

Yours sincerely

National Research Committee

Cc [a.adams@open.ac.uk](mailto:a.adams@open.ac.uk)  
[j.t.e.richardson@open.ac.uk](mailto:j.t.e.richardson@open.ac.uk)

## E2: NOMS Permission letters Phase 3 (NOMS Phase 2)



# Ministry of JUSTICE

National Offender  
Management Service

Mrs Anne Pike  
PhD candidate and lecturer  
The Open University  
[a.e.pike@open.ac.uk](mailto:a.e.pike@open.ac.uk)

**National Offender Management Service**  
National Research Committee  
Planning and Analysis Group  
BCG Building  
HMP Full Sutton  
York, YO41 1PS

Telephone: 01759 475099  
Fax: 01759 475 073  
Email: [National.Research@noms.qsi.gov.uk](mailto:National.Research@noms.qsi.gov.uk)

13 March 2012

### APPROVED- NOMS RESEARCH – PROBATION TRUSTS

Dear Mrs Pike

**Research Title:** Investigating prison based higher level distance learning (PHDL) and its impact on resettlement: Phase 2 Impact after release

**Reference:** 144-11 (a)

Further to your research application to the NOMS National Research Committee (NRC), and further to our letter dated 28 February 2012 (and further information Received); the Committee is pleased to grant approval in principle for your research.

Terms and Conditions still apply from our previous letter.

If prison probation trusts are to be approached as part of the research, a copy of this letter must be attached to the request to prove that the NRC has approved the study in principle.

Once the research is completed, and received by the NRC Co-ordinator, it will be lodged at the Prison Service College Library.

Yours sincerely

National Research Committee





# Ministry of JUSTICE

National Offender  
Management Service

## National Research Committee - Terms and Conditions

### All research

- **Changes to study** - Informing and updating the NRC promptly of any changes made to the planned methodology.
- **Dissemination of research** The researcher should prepare a research summary for NOMS (approximately three pages, maximum of five pages) which (i) summaries the research aims and approach, (ii) highlights the key findings, and (iii) sets out the implications for NOMS decision-makers. It should be submitted to the [NRC](#) alongside the NRC project review form (which covers lessons learnt and asks for ratings on key questions). Provision of the research summary and project review form is essential if the research is to be of real use to NOMS. The report should use language that an educated, but not research-trained person, would understand. It should be concise, well organised and self-contained. The conclusions should be impartial and adequately supported by the research findings. Further guidance on the format of the report is available on request.
- **Publications** - The NRC ([National.research@noms.qsi.gov.uk](mailto:National.research@noms.qsi.gov.uk)) receiving an electronic copy of any papers submitted for publication based on this research at the time of submission and at least one month in advance of the publication.
- **Data protection** - Compliance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Offender Management Act 2007 -
  - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/21/contents>
  - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents>

Researchers should store all data securely and ensure that information is coded in a way that maintains the confidentiality and anonymity of research participants. The researchers should abide by any data sharing conditions stipulated by the relevant data controllers.

- **Research participants** - Consent must be given freely. It will be made clear to participants verbally and in writing that they may withdraw from the research at any point and that this will not have adverse impact on them. If research is undertaken with vulnerable people – such as young offenders, offenders with learning difficulties or those who are vulnerable due to psychological, mental disorder or medical circumstances - then researchers should put special precautions in place to ensure that the participants understand the scope of their research and the role that they are being asked to undertake. Consent will usually be required from a parent or other responsible adult for children to take part in the research.
- **Termination** - NOMS reserves the right to halt research at any time. It will not always be possible to provide an explanation, but NOMS will undertake where possible to provide the research institution/sponsor with a covering statement to clarify that the decision to stop the research does not reflect on their capability or behaviour.

### Research requiring access to prison establishments and/or probation trusts

- **Access** - Approval from the Governor of each establishment / Chief Executive of the probation trust you wish to research in. (Please note that NRC approval does not guarantee access to establishments/trusts; access is at the discretion of the Governor/Chief Executive and subject to local operational factors and pressures). This is subject to clearance of vetting procedures for each establishment/trust.
- **Security** - Compliance with all security requirements
- **Prison Service** - Researchers are under a duty to disclose certain information to the Prison Service. This includes behaviour that is against prison rules and can be adjudicated against (see Section 51 of the Prison Rules 1999), illegal acts, and behaviour that is harmful to the research participant (e.g. intention to self-harm or complete suicide). Researchers should make research participants aware of this requirement. The Prison Rules can be accessed [here](#) and should be reviewed.



# Ministry of JUSTICE

National Offender  
Management Service

[http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/guidance/prison-probation-and-rehabilitation/psipso/PSO\\_0100\\_the\\_prison\\_rules\\_1999.doc](http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/guidance/prison-probation-and-rehabilitation/psipso/PSO_0100_the_prison_rules_1999.doc)

- **Probation Trusts** - Researchers are under a duty to disclose certain information to probation trusts. This includes information that either indicates a risk of harm to themselves or others or refers to a new crime that they have committed or plan to commit. Researchers should make research participants aware of this requirement.





# Ministry of JUSTICE

National Offender  
Management Service

Mrs Anne Pike  
PhD candidate and lecturer  
The Open University  
[a.e.pike@open.ac.uk](mailto:a.e.pike@open.ac.uk)

National Offender Management Service  
National Research Committee  
Planning and Analysis Group  
BCG Building  
HMP Full Sutton  
York, YO41 1PS

Telephone: 01759 475099

Fax: 01759 475 073

Email: [National.Research@noms.qsi.gov.uk](mailto:National.Research@noms.qsi.gov.uk)

23 February 2012

## APPROVED SUBJECT TO MODIFICATIONS – NOMS RESEARCH – PROBATION

Dear Mrs Pike

**Research Title:** Investigating prison based higher level distance learning (PHDL) and its impact on resettlement: Phase 2 Impact after release

**Reference:** 144-11 (a)

Further to your research application to the NOMS National Research Committee (NRC), and further to our letter dated 7 February 2012, the Committee is pleased to grant approval in principle for your research. Having reviewed the information that you have provided the committee has requested the following information/modifications:

1. **Participant Contact** - How is the researcher going to trace the individuals for follow up? What assistance does the researcher need from the probation trusts? Does the researcher want the probation trusts to trace them/ask for their consent? Is it correct that they will all be on a licence to the probation service, i.e. all will have been given a sentence of 12 months or more?
2. **Interview Guide** – Please could the researcher provide examples of the questions that are to be used in the interview guide.
3. **Information Sheet/Consent Form** –
  - a. NOMS PSI 2010 41, section 5.5 – As part of the signed consent form, researchers must inform research participants that they have a duty to divulge the following information:
    - i. Behaviour that is against prison rules and can be adjudicated against (please see Section 51 of the Prison Rules 1999)
    - ii. Information that either indicates a risk of harm to themselves or others or refers to a new crime that they have committed or plan to commit
    - iii. Undisclosed illegal acts
    - iv. Behaviour that is harmful to the research participant (e.g. intention to self-harm or commit suicide)
    - v. Information that raises concerns about terrorist, radicalisation or security issues.
  - b. Researcher contact details should be removed from the information sheet/consent form. All contact should be routed through the probation trusts.

Before the research can commence you must agree formally by email to the NRC ([National.research@noms.qsi.gov.uk](mailto:National.research@noms.qsi.gov.uk)), confirming that you will comply with the terms and conditions outlined below and the expectations set out in the NOMS Research Instruction

141211



# Ministry of **JUSTICE**

National Offender  
Management Service

[http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/guidance/prison-probation-and-rehabilitation/psipso/psi\\_2010\\_41\\_research\\_applications.doc](http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/guidance/prison-probation-and-rehabilitation/psipso/psi_2010_41_research_applications.doc)

If probation trusts are to be approached as part of the research, a copy of this letter must be attached to the request to prove that the NRC has approved the study in principle.

Once the research is completed, and received by the NRC Co-ordinator, it will be lodged at the Prison Service College Library.

Yours sincerely

National Research Committee

Cc      Researchers and Supervisors copied in for information.





E3 Excerpt from spreadsheet used to short-list prisons for selection (highlighting complexity of 'good practice')

Reg	Prac t/Of sted view	Cat/ Priv	OU data						PET data / Virtual Campus			Other providers	
			Apr- 11	Jul- 11	% with online code	Pass 10B	Pass L1- L3	% Pass L1-L3	Apps Jan-Dec funded)	(not all NK's list	NEC	OCA	
1		F	11	13	15	3/3	5/8	62.5		1	0		
1		B	31	24	75	5/15	10/28	35.7	73	4			
4		C	12	13	40	1/2	2/3	66.0	Virtual Campus Trials		2		
4		G4S	18	22	45	5/6	9/19	47.3	78 - any leavers?		3		
4		C	12	16	100	2/3	5/7	71.0	Virtual Campus Trials	3	2	1	
5		F	12	10	50	1/2	7/10	70.0	33, strongest female prison but no leavers	1	11		
5		B	37	39	46	11/16	21/30	70.0		1	1		
5		Serco	48	51	37	4/14	13/36	36.1	60	2	0		
5		C	23	28	11	0/3	9/19	47.4	44 but very good practice	1	6	1	
5		D	6	8	88	4/4	12/16	75.0		0	1		
6		C	15	16	44	2/4	6/12	50.0	Sex offenders	2		1	
6		C	23	17	12	1/1	8/14	57.1	49	3	9		
6		D	5	12	25	2/2	4/6	66.7		7	10		

Good or sought after practice

Average

Poor or not in scope

E4: Screenshot of 18-page NOMS permission form

Short-list of 20 prisons provided for question 10.

10. Please select each region and then select the establishments / offices within those regions where you wish to conduct the research:

☐ Altcourse

☐ Buckley Hall

☐ Forest Bank

☐ Garth

☐ Haverigg

☐ Hindley

7

88119/247205/33/236

NOMS Form

IRAS Version 3.3

☒ North West

☐ Kennet

☐ Kirkham

☐ Lancaster Castle

☐ Lancaster Farms

☐ Liverpool



**E5 Selection process: Small anonymised sample of matched data from Ministry of Justice for release dates.**

Data supplied to Ministry of Justice			Data returned by the Ministry of Justice (with earliest release date)					
Name	DOB	Prison	Prison No.	Name	DOB	Establishment	Earliest Release	Extract Date
	08/03/1989	HMP Highpoint			08/08/1989	Highpoint South	10/01/2013	11/12/2011
		HMP Stafford			02/10/1987	Stafford	31/12/9999	11/12/2011
	1972-07-01	HMP The Mount			01/07/1972	The Mount	13/05/2010	11/12/2011
	22/07/1966	HMP Rye Hill			22/07/1966	Rye Hill	31/12/9999	11/12/2011
		HMP Parc			14/06/1970	Usk	02/03/2012	11/12/2011
	14/01/1974	HMP The Mount			14/01/1974	The Mount	20/10/2013	11/12/2011
	30/12/1979	HMP Kirklevington Grange			30/12/1979	Kirklevington Grange	31/05/2010	11/12/2011
		HMP Rye Hill			15/09/1980	Bure	14/02/2015	11/12/2011
		HMP Swaleside			18/10/1969	The Verne	31/12/9999	11/12/2011
	19/2/1987	HMP Ford			19/02/1987	Coldingley	18/01/2012	11/12/2011
	25/04/1985	HMP Wandsworth			25/04/1985	Bure	31/12/9999	11/12/2011
	24/01/1982	HMP Wymott			24/01/1982	Manchester	31/12/9999	20/07/2009
		HMP Hollesley Bay Colony			22/08/1976	Hollesley Bay	03/11/2012	11/12/2011
		HMP Erlestoke Hall			17/07/1981	Erlestoke	20/02/2006	11/12/2011
	1988-05-08	HMP The Mount			08/05/1988	Hollesley Bay	27/01/2013	11/12/2011
	1975-11-25	HMP Swaleside			25/11/1975	Swaleside	31/12/9999	11/12/2011
	02/04/1975	HMP Wandsworth			02/04/1975	Wandsworth	22/12/2012	11/12/2011
		HMP Kirkham			21/08/1985	Kirkham	25/11/2011	11/12/2011
	19/07/1986	HMP Ford			19/07/1986	Ford	06/02/2012	11/12/2011

APPENDIX F Participant Characteristics

F1: Pilot participant characteristics

Name	ID	Gen	Age left school	Age	Prev. Ed Quals.	DL Provider	DL courses	No of Conv-ictions	Sent-ence (yrs)	Offence	Time since release
Anthony	1-6-A1	M	16	40-49	Low GCSE	Hammersmith-Fulham	1 + Ext degree	3	3		9 yrs
Dan	1-2-D1	M	18	60-69	A-level	OU	1	1	1		6 mths
Dennis	1-3-D2	M	18	40-49	Low GCSE	OU	7	1	20	Murder	10 yrs
Doug	1-10-D3	M	15	40-49	None	Pitman	3	4	5		10 yrs
Elliot	1-1-E1	M	18	40-49	A-level	OU	5	2	4	Receiving stolen goods	1 yr
Ivan	1-5-I1	M	18	30-39	HE	NEC/HCC	2	1	6		1 yr
Paul	1-7-P1	M	18	60-69	A-level	OU	1	1	2		4 yrs
Sally	1-8-S1	F	16	30-39	GCSE	ICS (Bus)	1	2	2		1 yr
Stuart	1-9-S2	M	13	30-39	None	OU	2	1	Life	Murder	2 yrs
Bob	1-4-B1	M	16	50-59	GCSE	OU	8	2	9		1 yr



F2: In-prison participant characteristics

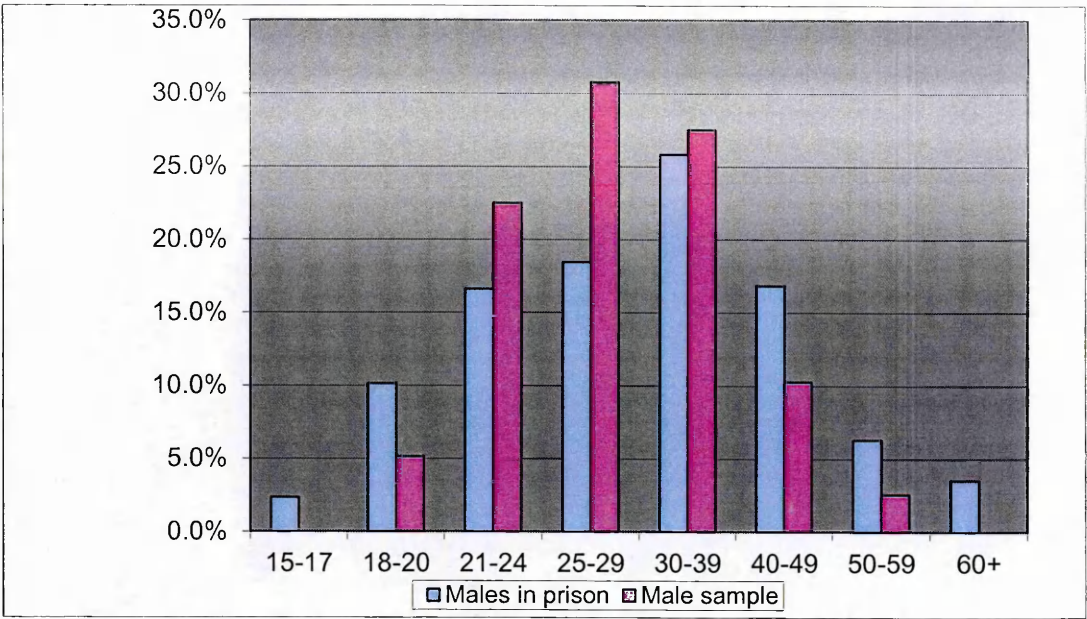


Figure F2.1 Age distribution of male participants compared to the male prison population (NOMS, 2011)

Table F2.1: Self-reported participant qualifications

Highest pre-prison qualification	Men	%	Women	%	Total	% of total	Total PET Survey
Unknown	3	6%			3	6%	
No formal qualification	16	31%	2	4%	18	35%	21%
GCSE (or equivalent)	8	16%	4	8%	12	24%	45%*
A-Levels (or equivalent)	11	22%	4	8%	15	29%	40%*
Higher Education	2	4%	1	2%	3	6%	11%*
Totals	40	78%	11	22%	51	100%	*

\* the PET survey did not specify highest qualification so respondents ticked all that applied (Entry level to post-graduate)

F3: Post-release participant characteristics

Primary participants in scope for longitudinal phase (n=38)														
Name	ID	Pr	m/ f	Age	Age left FT ed.	Prev Ed Qual	DL Prov	Subj/ DNE	D L	No. of conv	Sent (yrs)	crime	Aspiration	Relevant Background/ Learning/ Research issues
Brian	1	P1	M	25-29	15	None	UKPr op/O U	Bus	2	3	2.5	Drugs related	Self-employment + settle down	Mum estate agent who did DL but Dad hasn't done much ed. Had a mentor
Kevin	2	P4	M	21-24	16	Low GCSE	St	Psy	1	3	2	Arson- alcohol related	Work with ex-offenders re. care, drug and alcohol abuse	Recalled within a month. Failed to start OU course
Rees	3	P2	M	21-24	17	A-level	OU	Psy	2	1	3		Sport psychology and start a gym	Failed OU psychology course post-release but good employment later.
Alan	4	S4	M	21-24	14	None	OU	Math	1	4 CJ	6		A successful career with security	Has family support. Did teaching assistant job. Recalled-failed to inform of change of address
Marty	5	M2	M	30-39	15	HE (HND)	OU	Psy/ Y	0	8	3	GBH	Get back to work – just live day by day	DNE openings. Bi-polar and sociopathic disorder. Recalled quickly to another prison (inaccessible)



Colin	6	S1	M	21-24	15	None	St/ OU	Math I P	1	3	2.25		Carry on working – something to keep me out of trouble	GCSEs and A levels in YOI. Did beginners criminology (St) but failed to get funding for W100 (OU). Recalled
Jubal	7	R2	M	25-29	16	Low GCSE	OU	math Y	0	2	7	Car crime	Start own business. Import electronics	DNE openings. Probation gatekeeper issues. Did not wish to participate in research post-release
Winston	8	R1	M	25-29	11	None	OU	Lang /P	1	5	4	Robbery	Stay out of trouble. Be happy with a good family – not in this country	Dyslexic. Failed at the Italian course. Transferred to another prison before release. See tutor comments. Not traced.
Darren	9	M1	M	25-29	15	None	NCF E	P	1	4	4		Mentoring with youth in gangs + possibly a Uni place on Youth work	Family breakdown – got derailed. Not traced
Afram	10	M4	M	40-49	18	A- level+	OU	Sci/ psy	10	1	10	Import	Go back to Iraq. look for a job. If I get a chance to study part-time I will. For a job I need a certificate	Returned to Iraq. OU refused online access. Last course DSE141 passed, not recorded due to OU errors. Requested transfer of credits to Iraq but did not happen
Tina	11	D4	F	21-24	16	GCSE +	OU	Bus	2	1	7		I want a job in Admin or IT engineering	Failed to continue studying
Manwell	12	M9	M	30-39	18	A-level	OU	Env sci	3	1	17	Drug dealer	Finish off the course. Pursue a career in environmental science	Probation details incorrect. Took 4 months to find him. Continued to study after difficulties. Good family





Malcolm	20	P3	M	21-24	14	GCSE	OU	Bus & farm man	1	1	4	Assault	Go to Agricultural College to become a horse farrier (blacksmith). Then have a small-holding and settle down.	Traveller. Family support. Father runs a pub/restaurant and. went to Uni + girlfriend heading for Uni.
Charles	21	S3	M	21-24	16	GCSE +	OU	Math	1	1	4	Death by DD	Go back and finish foundation degree	Family support. Had finished 1 year of foundation degree at Uni pre-prison.
Tristan	22	P6	M	18-20	16	GCSE	OU	Soc	1	1	3.6		Go to college to do A levels then ...I aim to go to Uni	Peer partner job in IT. Parents not supportive of education
Jed	23	F1	M	40-49	15	None	St	Couns / Psy	2	5	5	Drugs	To get clean then do drug counselling	No family –all died in last 5 years. Partner still using. Worked in education as a mentor
Sabir	24	M3	M	30-39	16	GCSE +	OU	Soc sci	3	3	8	Drugs	To move. To continue studying after rehab and then do mentoring	Release delayed due to immigration issues. Mentor on drug-free wing
Jafaar	25	F2	M	30-39	18	A-level equiv	OU	Bus	2	1	5.5		Work for myself in retail. + carry on OU for the degree.	Lost mum and grandparents while in prison. Failed OU after release
Eric	26	H4	M	25-29	-	GCSE +	OU	Bus	2	1	13.5	Death by DD	To get a better qualification which will allow me to get higher paid work	At college when went to prison. In brother [stockbroker]'s shadow.





Lucy	34	V2	F	21-24	19	A-level+	OU	Child	4	1	9		To continue with RoTL job	Worked in retail on RoTL. No contact
Travis	35	H7/Hu	M	25-29	18	A-level+	OU	Bus/IT	3	1	5.75		Finish degree and Develop web design business	Immigration issues. Delayed release.
Eddie	36	P7	M	30-39	16	GCSE	OU	Psy/Y	0	8	4	GBH/Robbery	None stated	Foster care/boys home. Late release. In-prison interview not private. Not traced
Simon	37	M6	M	50-59	15	None	St	Bus	1	1	6.5	Fraud	Go back to my landfill business	Own business – heavy plant Recalled immediately. Another sentence
Jonah	38	S7	M	30-39	19	A-level+	OU	Economics	9	1	12	Import drugs	Finish degree	Deported. Delayed access to online account. Missed resit exam due to DL provider errors

DNE = Did not engage (P = partial, Y = yes)

Perceived to have benefitted from PHDL in some way

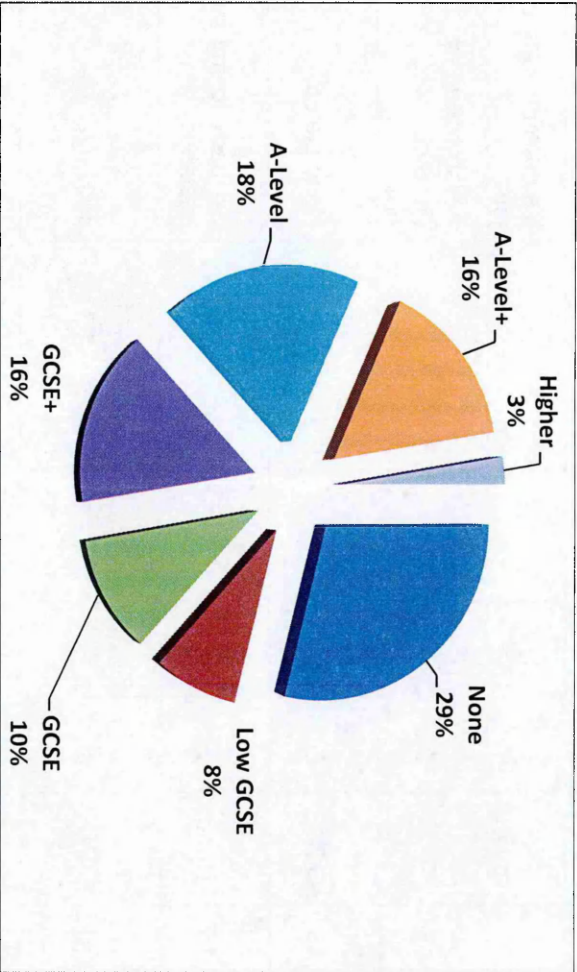


Figure F3.1 Pre-prison education distribution of the post-release participants

## APPENDIX G: Longitudinal data collection

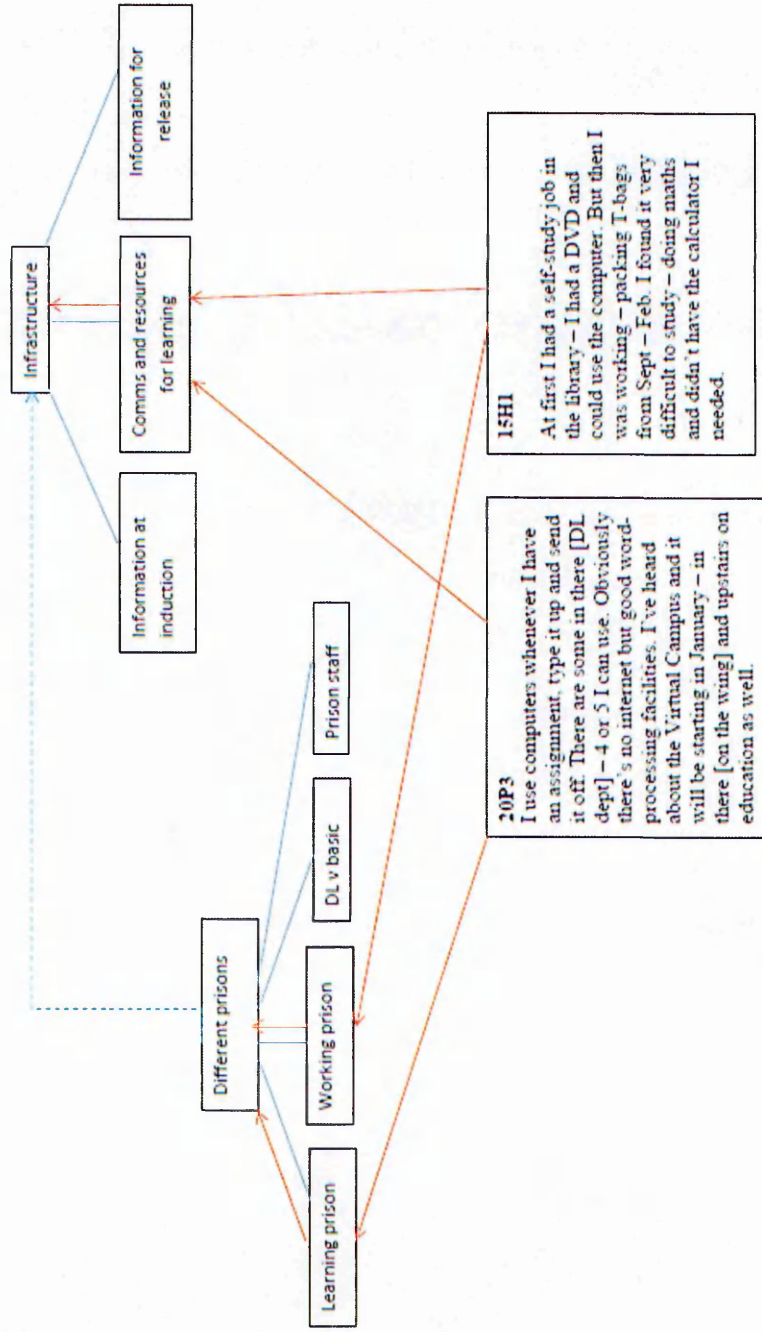
Ref	Name	Gender	Age range	No of DL courses	No of Convictions	Prison interview	2 <sup>nd</sup> prison or Int 1	Int 2	Int 3	Int 4	Int 5	Int 6
1-P1	Brian	M	25-29	2	3	-10d	+4m	+5m	+7m	+8m	+9m	+10m
2-P4	Kevin	M	21-24	2	2	-3w	recall (+6m)					
3-P2	Rees	M	21-24	1	1	-2m	+2.5m	+6m	+8m			
4-S4	Alan	M	21-24	1	1	-3m	+3m	recall +10m				
5-M2	Marty	M	30-39	0	8	-2w	recall					
6-S1	Colin	M	21-24	1	3	-4m	+2m	+5m	recall			
7-R2	Jubal	M	25-29	0	2	-3m	+6m prob					
10-M4	Afram	M	40-49	10	1	-2m	+5m	+6m	+7m			
11-D4	Tina	F	21-24	2	1	-5 m	+3m	+4m				
12-M9	Manwell	M	30-39	3	1	-2m	+6m					
13-V1	Sheena	F	25-29	8	1	-3m	+2m	+3m	+6m			
14-V6	Nina	F	21-24	2	1	-2m	+2m	+4m	+5m	+6m	+7m	+12m
15-H1	Abdul	M	25-29	4	1	-2m	+2m					
16-V4	Susan	F	51-60	5	1	-4m	+1m	+5m	+10m	+12m		
20-P3	Malcolm	M	21-24	1	1	-7m	+2m	+7m				
21-S3	Charles	M	21-24	1	1	-6m	+3m	+4m	+7m			
22-P6	Tristan	M	18-20	1	1	-6m	-4d	+1m				
23-F1	Jed	M	40-49	2	5	-8m	-4d	+2m	+12m			
24-M3	Sabir	M	30-39	3	3	-7m	+1m delay					
25-F2	Jafaar	M	30-39	3	1	-9m	Cat D -2m	+2m	+3m			
26-H4	Emman	M	25-29	2	1	-7m	-8d	+1m	+2m			
27-H5	Ernie	M	25-29	3	3	-7m	RoTL -2m	+3m				
30-S5	Chandre sh	M	25-29	3	5	-11m	RoTL -3m					
31-H3	Andrew	M	25-29	3	8	-7m	-2m	+2m	+6m			
32-H9	Nadish	M	30-39	8	4	-10m	Cat D -2m	RoTL -1m				
33-V3	Estha	F	25-29	4	1	9m	RoTL -1m					
37-M6	Simon	M	50-59	1	1	-9m	Recall(+8m)					
38-S7	Jonah	M	30-39	9	1	-6m	+2m	+3m				

Prison interview	Post-release interview	RoTL interview	Recall (interview)	DNE
------------------	------------------------	----------------	--------------------	-----



# APPENDIX H: Examples of thematic analysis

H1 Example of layered labels and how the coding linked through





## H2. Example of how Phase 1 findings informed Phase 2 and 3

The highlighted text was used to alter the Phase 2 or phase 3 schedules, or add specific questions to the phase interview prompts

### Emerging findings from partial analysis of Phase 1

#### **Memory (or disappointment?) changes your views**

P (in his second interview) was disappointed with his OU exam results – he thought that perhaps he was better at classroom learning – perhaps in a classroom (or with a teacher/tutor?) he would have known how to give an answer that was wanted. He didn't mention an OU tutor – only AM – in the prison. He did not now see the OU course as something particularly positive – merely something which occupied him. However, in his earlier interview (also after release but not long after) he had not mentioned the bad marks – merely that he had studied the OU course 'Open to change' because he wanted to know where life had gone wrong. He saw it as a VERY positive thing. - **need to ensure minimum time between interviews through gate + have longitudinal over as long a period as possible**

#### **Education issues in prison**

The Prison-based (behavioural) courses may be useful for those with psychological issues (S, I) IT restrictions but hope for change in future

Good support (pre-2010)

Varied support – arbitrary way support is given (I)

Support for DL is only as good as the person in charge of it – note differences in prison over time – **conflicting views of P (I in Phase 1 and current in Phase 2 – just check when T took over or management changed)**

#### **Potential post-release benefits of PHDL**

Self-confidence

Ability to start own business

Able to think differently, so no need to reoffend – **reflection??**

#### **Potential post-release drawbacks for learning**

Lack of structure. Too much going on – chaotic – study disrupted at very least

Lack of communication from hostel with learning providers (except for basic skills)

Technology

#### **Other post-release issues**

Stigma

Probation restrictions/recall (-ve)

Length of time on licence – needs to be long enough to adjust – for those who need safety of hostel (I, +ve)

Accommodation - hostels vary

Support – family mostly good.

Employment – difficult, often by chance (P), employment through gate works well (S1)



### H3: Example of graded text for the aspirations code

The highlighted text shows that those who did not engage with their learning had more negative or unrealistic aspirations

	Inward-looking /Prison context Dependent, unrealistic, Negative (1)	Outwardly-aware/ Employment/post-release (partially internalized) / showing some awareness (2)	Open-door/Knowledge for its own sake, self- esteem + choice/autonomy/hope, Concern, Awareness (mostly internalized) Positive (3)
Aspiration	<p>5M9 Plan to get back to work... just to live day by day. My problem is my temper</p> <p>6S1 something to keep me out of trouble</p> <p>6S1 carry on working basically</p> <p>8R1 stay out of trouble</p> <p>11D4 Well HE is just another course at the end of the day.</p> <p>15H1 no plans</p> <p>17V8 I will need to be a full-time mum so chance of going back to a full-time job is poor</p> <p>18H2 What can my achievements get me? I'd like to be a disk-jockey – at clubs and stuff like I used to be but someone nicked all my records.</p> <p>19M8 Set up my own company ... Maybe a nightclub and bar</p>	<p>1P1 self-employment + settle down</p> <p>3P2 initially recruitment of ex-prisoners then sport psychology + start up a gym</p> <p>4S4 The qualifications – I want a successful career</p> <p>7R2 I will definitely start my own business – maybe importing electronics</p> <p>9M1 mentoring with youths in gangs + possibly a Uni place (?) on Youth work</p> <p>10M4 for a job I need a certificate</p> <p>11D4 I want to do a Business Diploma</p> <p>13V1 do a few more courses and hopefully work in voluntary social care</p> <p>18 H2 finish course</p> <p>20P3 go to college to become a furrier with a small-holding</p> <p>21S3 Branch out on my own</p> <p>23F1-5d main thing is staying clean. I don't want to be super rich, just content you know</p>	<p>2P4 I want to do something that will make a difference - work with ex-offenders re care, drug and alcohol abuse</p> <p>12M9 concerned with environmental issues and thought a qualification would be constructive</p> <p>14V6 to graduate</p> <p>16V4 Continue studies in international development</p> <p>22P6-6m Go to college then University (for Law).</p> <p>23F1-8m I want to do drug counseling</p> <p>29M7 My passion is writing – with 2 anthologies so far and in the process of doing a third. I want my writing out there in the literary world</p> <p>31H3-2m I want a degree and the job should just follow from that.</p> <p>32H9 A degree and then use it</p>